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The viral art effect

How virality and viral art as a part of our social networks can affect our society and how we perceive interfaces.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to achieve a better understanding of virality and viral art beyond an object-oriented approach. Today our everyday lives are increasingly incorporated with Internet technology and our online representations of ourselves, and the social media platforms have become an influential source of information where they provide us with trending/viral content that shows up in abundance in our newsfeeds. Questions regarding how we are influenced by all this information arise all the time, with an ongoing debate about whether or not the Internet is a form of societies of control. The Internet as an intricate and sophisticated network that gives us the option of working from home and managing a lot of activities and actions without even leaving the bed in the morning, comes with a price. The cost is freedom, as our actions become monitored and a demand of availability becomes constant. As virality and viral art can spread very fast through the networks that the Internet consist of, they become parts of important events and topics. This cross-disciplinary study of the properties of virality and viral art as allegorical devices argues that viral art should not be understood as a standalone object but a combination of many elements present and part of our interaction online and how it can affect society. Virality and viral art is in a position where it can reach a very large proportion of the population, giving it a potentially high level of influence. In addition, it is to some extent in possession of qualities that can oppose the societies of control, and should be considered more as an effect than objects.

Sammendrag

Formålet med denne studien er å oppnå en bedre forståelse av viralitet og viral kunst utover en objektorientert tilnærming. I dag blir hverdagen i stadig større grad integrert med Internett-teknologi og våre online-representasjoner av oss selv, og de sosiale medier-plattformene har blitt en innflytelsesrik kilde til informasjon der de gir oss trending / viralt innhold som dukker opp i overflod i våre newsfeeds. Spørsmål om hvordan vi påvirkes av all denne informasjonen oppstår hele tiden, med en pågående debatt om hvorvidt Internett er en form for societies of control. Internett som et intrikat og sofistikert nettverk som gir oss muligheten til å jobbe hjemmefra og administrere mange aktiviteter og handlinger uten å forlate sengen om morgenen, kommer med en pris. Kostnaden er frihet, ettersom våre handlinger blir overvåket og et krav om å være tilgjengelig har blitt konstant. Ettersom viralitet og viral kunst kan spre seg veldig fort gjennom nettene som Internett består av, blir de komponenter i viktige hendelser og emner. Denne tverrfaglige studien av egenskapene til viralitet og viral kunst som allegoriske enheter, argumenterer for at viral kunst ikke bør forstås som en frittstående gjenstand, men en sammensetning av mange elementer som er til stede og en del av vår interaksjon online, og hvordan det kan påvirke samfunnet vårt. Viralitet og viral kunst er i en posisjon hvor den kan nå ut til en veldig stor andel av befolkningen, noe som gir den potensielt høy grad av innflytelse. I tillegg er den til en viss grad i besittelse av kvaliteter som kan motsette seg societies of control, og bør betraktes mer som en effekt enn gjenstander.

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Introduction

1.1 The appealing but elusive concept of going viral

Although perhaps already an overused term for some online social media, addressing something as viral certainly is an almost all encompassing word added to videos, images, GIF's and (almost) any other format that is possible to share online. Viral as a term today is something that is used as a flag or a beacon to inform you that the content it is addressing, is something that you must see. Something that stand out from most of the other content that you get exposed to on a regular basis: Content that (most) people find worthy of engaging with, further sharing it within their own network of people.

It seems that the Internet stimulates us in a way that makes it easy to compare it to the moth to the flame analogy, and the viral content represents some of the brightest lights out there. The freedom to explore almost unlimited amounts of content surely is something that seems to address our human minds in a seductive way, and further encourage us to share the stuff we find most engaging. Viral content is most often the content that people online engage with the most, the type of content that is most circulated on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, Instagram, Tumblr and many more. As a result of this, in the last couple of years we see that the focus of social media platforms is on the trending stuff. Trending content gets likes and is forwarded via sharing with others in our networks. All of the biggest social media platforms have chosen to base their existence on being messengers or deliverers of trending content to their users, and letting us decide what we deem good or bad content. And even though the design of the approval/non approval element built into the platforms varies, their template is pretty much the same. Facebook and Youtube have likes, Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest have hearts, and Reddit and Imgur have upvotes and downvotes. Within the social media platforms, all of the content that is posted publicly can be rated in relation to the engagement of likes, hearts or upvotes it gets. It is no wonder then, that the content we share and approve or disapprove, relies on a continuous flow of new content, and that the possible fame and exposure some of the most popular shared images, videos or various other formats get, can be a big driving factor for many of the artists, creators and owners of original content. In fact, the easy accessibility of creative tools modern technology has to offer, together with the easy sharing online, has opened the gates for a population of internet artists.

There is a power in the most popular content, both for the artist behind, but mostly within the prospect of virality itself.

Behind any artist, his or her expression in relation to their artworks follows, and with expression, interpretations, messages, analysis and many other underlying subjects emerge from an object's interaction with the world. It it possible to say then, that virality and viral art on any scale has the potential to influence the world in some way, and that virality can work as a form of accelerating popularity boost in relation to artworks. But perhaps it can be influential on a deeper scale in relation to our society? At this point it is only reasonable to begin to wonder about how viral art actually works, and how it can shape our society. Nowadays, the younger generations are growing up in an online environment, shaping their own online personas and navigating through the Web from an increasingly early age. Viral art and virality play a big role in this navigation, in the way that they highlight the current trending content on the Web. But it goes deeper than that, as viral art can play on our understanding of interfaces, aesthetics, representability and political propaganda to name a few.

The most recent example of this occurring in the mainstream media, was the 2016 US presidential election, when the presidential candidates chose to incorporate memes in their campaigns. One of the candidates stood out above the rest though, namely Donald Trump and his involvement with the alt-right movement and their appropriated meme mascot, Pepe the frog. The alt-right incarnation of Pepe the frog as a racist and white nationalist meme symbol of hate, and the ties between Trump and the movement garnered a lot of media attention, with many articles crowning Trump as a supreme champ of the meme wars. Additionally, the communities where alt-right Pepe originated from, were slung into the media spotlight as well. Another important aspect of the election was the importance of fake news and their potential influence on the presidential election. The result was a confusing and messy campaign, where yellow journalism and similar tabloid elements acted as very distracting elements in a very important event for the US and the rest of the world in general. Questions regarding the influence of virality in this setting arise in the aftermath.

1.2 Research goals

The theme of this thesis revolves around virality and viral art, its qualities and mechanics within networks and interfaces, and the potential influence viral art can have in a society of control, based on theories from social science and digital humanities. Since virality and viral art are terms that are both widely used and can be defined in relation to many different instances, I address the following component questions in order to frame virality and viral art in relation to the topics:

1) What is viral art?
2) How do we approach viral art in a non-objectical way?
3) How can viral art influence our society?
4) Is it possible for viral art to function as an opposing force within Deleuze's theory of societies of control?

This research focus on two aspects of virality: a historical and critical analysis of the characteristics and multidisciplinary roots of virality and viral art with emphasis on its connection with social media platforms and social network theory, and; an analysis and discussion of the appropriation and use of viral art in the mainstream media in general, with a heightened focus on 2016 US presidential campaign by the presidential candidates and within. I will approach this mainly through the theoretical framework of Gilles Deleuze's societies of control and Alexander Galloway's understanding of interfaces as allegorical devices.

The historical and critical analysis aims to build an understanding of virality and viral art, its connection with Web 2.0 tools, online social media platforms and social network theory. The analysis and discussion further builds on the understanding of viral art as an effect rather than objects appearing in our newsfeeds on various social media platforms meant for entertainment purposes only. While entertainment undoubtedly plays a big role in virality and viral art, the underlying politics of anything that ends up trending online, is of equal importance and thus cannot be dismissed. By analyzing examples where viral art seemingly played a role in the outcome of important events, we are able to acquire clues about the role of new media, and reveal the multiple political processes within a digital environment that come together with the additional layers of any content related to our use of interfaces. This

approach also allows us to see the potential forces of viral art in today's world that is partly driven by online social media. Further it asks whether viral art can actually be said to play the role as an opposing force within a system sharing the characteristics of a Deleuzian society of control. Additionally, this thesis contextualizes how virality and viral art are interesting and important parts of the academic landscape surrounding our use and adaptation of the online world and related technology, in our everyday life. Virality and viral art are becoming so present in many people's lives, and is used as vehicles for topics and events that can have substantial influence on our society and communities.

And while it seems that virality and viral art initially can work together with resisting forces within a society of control, it can be just as easily adopted and appropriated by the system itself and big institutions and influential actors whose agenda is more in line with enforcing the societies of control, rather than opposing it. In addition to this we see underground communities making a jump onto the front page of the Internet, as a result of virality and viral art as an effect in correlation with our use of interfaces and our politics. As technology is being constantly replaced by new technology, and the online climate and environment is constantly evolving, it is hard to make precise predictions about the future position of virality and viral art. But this makes it even more important to understand what we already know to be true, and to approach subjects in ways that helps us assess and mediate our situation within the systems of seemingly perpetual mediation. Virality and viral art might help us with this.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

Following this introduction, the methodological framework is introduced. This chapter will elaborate on the inventory of theories presented in Chapter 3, and argue for the relevance of an interdisciplinary approach, that can bring forth valuable insights into the societal effect viral events and topic can have. In Chapter 3 relevant background information and introduction to relevant theories will be presented. Considering that this thesis is moving between different disciplinary approaches, theories from digital humanities, social science, computer science, philosophy and arts will be the main focus. These theories will be considered relevant to the understanding of virality and viral art in relation to the technologies of social media and human interaction. Chapter 3 then, will lay the foundation for the upcoming discussion. Chapter 4 begins with an exploration of the technologies that enable viral content to thrive, namely the introduction of Web 2.0 tools and the different

types of social media platforms and how the relation between the active consumer and the underlying economical agendas of the platforms work. Here we also find important keywords like “social”, “sharing”, “connectivity” “public” “for-profit” and “non-profit” and how these define virality connected to the social network theory and terms like homophily and communicative action. Hints about the evolution of social media in relation to the societies of control are also explored. Moving onto virality itself, we analyze the key elements of the term and how different definitions of it is applied depending on the setting. Chapter four finishes with an examination of art, and a definition of viral art as well as a look at some of the most common genres of online art and and evaluation of their potential to go viral. Chapter 5 ups the discussion about virality and viral art as effects or allegorical devices, by analyzing three different examples of virality and viral art to determine their influence on society and whether they can stand against a society of control. Chapter 6 will close this thesis and add final considerations and conclusions.

2 Research Methodology

2.1 Topic examination

The base of this thesis is that of the so-called cross-disciplinary or multidisciplinary approach, and is the result of combining approaches from science, technology, art and media studies in order to examine virality and viral art and its role in relation to society and networks. The goal is to highlight the role of virality and viral art especially, as viral content have become a significant source of information and belongs to the part of content that the public is exposed to on a day-to-day basis when using social media platforms. The study of this relationship is conducted from the point of view of the digital humanities but applying theories and studies from other disciplines. The reason for this cross-disciplinary approach is found in the nature of the ensemble of technologies behind Web 2.0 and social media, that provide the terms with many characteristics that again produce very different effects. It all boils down to the relational character of these technologies and how they offer a vast pool of interesting, inspiring and productive aspects, all the while being a challenge to a critical approach

It is important to note that a cross-disciplinary approach like this makes it hard to cover all the in-depth knowledge of the more complicated aspects that are often commonly associated with the theories applied in this thesis (like Deleuze and his neurological approach to art, which lies very close to that of the natural sciences). The result of this is that the theories may lack in diversity, but is still applied sufficiently enough to highlight the concepts in relation to the goal of this thesis.

As part of the goal is to understand the role and societal effect virality and viral art can have on today's society, there has been quite a lot of focus on gaining insight into recent viral events and topics, trying to find examples where viral art plays a role in the outcome of the event. As one the main examples is based on events leading up to and taking place during the 2016 US presidential campaign, some of the challenges have been to address this without having too much of a political approach, but rather analyze and compare the use of viral art against the provided theoretical framework. It is also important to note that the use of "politics" in this thesis is in a broad form that covers not only state governance but also common, everyday basis relations among actors.

There has not been a lot of similar research on virality and viral art before, and especially not on the influence viral art can have on society and culture. One of the reasons may be that until very recently, our technological evolution and implementation have not been sufficient enough to carry out viral events and topics on a scale similar to that of the 2016 US presidential campaign. A couple of noteworthy articles on similar subjects regarding viral art, are Alejandra Emilia Iannone's *Viral art matters* (2015), and Malcom Miles's *Viral art: Strategies for a new democracy* (2001). Virality is a popular subject among marketing franchising and for artists that want to get their content "out there". This is related to the turn towards a focus on for-profit social media platforms and the many diverse ways creators of content can make a living of social media. Since the focus is very much oriented towards how to make viral content, the effects viral content can have on society becomes sidelined. In other words, there are many blogs and articles about how to go viral, or how to streamline your content in the best way for it to be picked up as a trending subject, but very few inputs on the subject from critical different angles or from an academic approach.

2.2 Theoretical Material

As already mentioned, the range of the theoretical framework applied in this thesis, was selected in order to conduct a multidisciplinary analysis and discussion, with emphasis on social science and digital humanities. The primary theories chosen for the theme were filtered, selected and taken from a vast field of material from many respected practitioners. In other words, an author or publisher's status and relation to universities or institutes, played a role in order to apply sources of high quality. However, due to the nature of virality and viral art, some sources originate from and mainstream media and sources that are highly dependent on or benefit from virality. This is something that needs to be taken into consideration when analysing the effect of fake news and the presidential campaign, especially when one of the challenges with determining what is real or fake also stems from biased or yellow journalism within mainstream media itself.

Important contributors to the shaping of virality and how it goes online in this thesis, are Karine Nahon and Jeff Hemsley's work in their book *Going Viral* (Nahon and Hemsley 2013). Nahon's article *Toward a theory of network gatekeeping: A framework for exploring information control* (Barzilai-Nahon 2008), about gatekeeping theory has also been used as a source of inspiration and foundation of this research. Regarding social networks and social

media, Charles Kadushin's book *Understanding social networks : theories, concepts, and findings* (Kadushin 2012) and José van Dijck's *The Culture of connectivity : a critical history of social media* (van Dijck 2013), have been fundamental platforms for theory and inspiration. For inspiration on how to tackle with viral art in a non-objectical approach, this thesis relies heavily on the work of Alexander Galloway and his book *The Interface Effect* (Galloway 2012) and Gilles Deleuze's *Postscript on the societies of control* (Deleuze 1992). Even if not mentioned explicitly in this thesis it is also important to mention Michel Foucault and his *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison* (1977), as both Deleuze and Galloway base their theories on Foucault's disciplinary society.

The rest of the papers, books, articles and websites on the theoretical aspects related to virality and social media are used to further build on the framework of this thesis. from authors and researchers within, and many of these contributions are striving towards expanding our understanding of the fields related to virality, viral art and social media.

2.3 Examples of virality and viral art

As the main points of discussion regarding virality and viral art as a societal influence, three examples will act as key elements: Fake news, Zardulu's staged viral artworks, and the alt-right movement's appropriation of Pepe the frog as a racist hate symbol. While fake news is mainly used as an example related to virality in general, it is also meant to work as a link between how virality works, and viral art as an artform. The example of Zardulu will also work as a form of counter example to the 2016 US presidential campaign, to prevent the thesis from becoming one sided and too oriented around one big political event and topic. While the presidential campaign took place directly in the media spotlight, Zardulu's art seems to do the opposite.

2.3.1 Fake news

The challenges of determining originality and authenticity seems to be very present in the age of digital technologies, as the computer together with the Internet allows anyone to act as a medium and create, mold and manipulate images, videos or text in order to convey something. Sometimes, this makes it harder to verify content before it gains momentum as links are given the same weighting regardless of source, especially on sites like Facebook with a potential audience of 1.8bn. One interesting example of this is the explosion of so-

called “fake news”. Fake news is in its purest form are completely made up, and is manipulated to resemble credible journalism and attract maximum attention with a goal of gaining advertising revenue (Hunt 2016). Articles that successfully manage to copy this format and discretely manipulate real life events or even fabricate stories from the bottom-up, prove to be difficult to tell apart from real news. The result can be both harmless and quite harmful, as proven in relation to the 2016 U.S presidential campaign, where a number of fake news articles gained worldwide attention with some serious consequences. Perhaps the most famous example of fake news, the “Pizzagate” conspiracy theory, where on 4 December, a North Carolina man opened fire at the Washington pizzeria Comet Ping Pong and claimed to “self investigate” the site, after reading an online conspiracy theory where the pizzeria is purported to be the headquarters of a child sex ring run by Hillary Clinton (Wendling 2016). Other examples are fake news reports, about Democratic senators wanting to impose sharia law in Florida, (which was repeated and tweeted by Michael Flynn, Trump’s nominee for national security adviser), and a false report that Trump supporters were chanting “we hate Muslims, we hate blacks, we want our great country back” at a rally, reported as true on election night (Hunt 2016).

2.3.2 Alt-right and Pepe the frog

Originally Pepe the frog was conceived by comic artist Matt Furie, but started trending as a meme sometime around 2010 on different messageboards like 4chan and reddit. In the later years, Pepe the frog has remained one of the most popular memes and proved its worth as a very adaptive and flexible meme for the better and worse it seems. About the same time as Donald Trump entered the US 2016 presidential campaign, the meaning and association of Pepe changed. Trump’s position as presidential candidate together with some obscure events where reddit and 4chan users professed to believe that Pepe is a reincarnation of Kek, an Egyptian frog-god who ruled over chaos and darkness, and that his coming is a sign that Donald Trump will save them all (Pepethefrogfaith.com 2017), ended in a series of memes where Pepe was used as racist and white nationalist meme symbol of hate (figure 1).

Figure 1: "Original Pepe the frog compared to different alt-right incarnations of Pepe".

2.3.3 Zardulu and her staged viral artworks

Although the commercial aspect behind viral events and topics may be a main motivator for many artists, it is important to note that there are examples of viral artists out there that do it for other reasons. One of them, a woman going by the name "Zardulu", is approaching viral art in a different way than most. Zardulu's art builds upon elaborately staged viral videos, that work best when her involvement is unseen. Her most famous artworks are the "Selfie Rat" that shows a video of rat appearing to take a self-portrait with a passed-out man's phone on a subway platform, the "pizza eating rat" (figure 2), and the "Three-Eyed Gowanus Canal Catfish Project" where videos of people claiming that they've caught three-eyed catfish in the Gowanus canal in Brooklyn, New York, by showing and filming taxidermied catfish (made by Zardulu), with an extra eye stuck to the middle of their foreheads (figure 3). As Zardulu's art is based on elaborate hoaxes and require that the artist remains unknown and un-affiliated with the artworks in order to work best, it is reasonable to presume that Zardulu is behind several other viral videos as well. In fact, Zardulu is only known through actors that have been hired by her to take part in her artworks, that have later reached out the media and newspapers in relation to the artwork they contributed to has gone viral (Newman 2016 2016).

Figure 2: "The Pizza rat"

Figure 3 "One of Zardulu's three-eyed Catfish"

3 Theoretical framework

3.1 Virality is networked: Social networks

Connections are a part of being human. We meet new people and get in touch with both essential and nonessential contacts all the time. Our connections can be said to exist in a symbiose with communication, as something most of us relate to on a daily basis. Networks then, can be described as "a set of relationships" (Kadushin 2012, 14). Looking at it from a technical point of view, a network is a set of objects (nodes) where the relation between these objects are being mapped. It is therefore impossible for a network to consist of only one object, as there are no connection between any other object. The simplest of networks has to consist of at least two objects, with at least one relation that binds them together (Kadushin 2012). These objects can be anything, from two books in the library, to a couple of humans driving in a car. The relations in these two examples can be as simple as both objects occupying the same space (the library and the car).

This is what makes social network theory a powerful and useful tool on many levels of complexity when it comes to groups in social science. Anything from a relation between two individuals, to entire global systems can be analyzed by putting into scope on the relations and nodes within them. The relation between only two objects (also known as dyads) is in most cases too simple when it comes to groups, where simple networks of three units (called triads) is used as building blocks for more complex relations (Kadushin 2012).

When we connect with others, we are building or expanding on our social networks, and it is through these social networks that we pass on anything from knowledge, friendship, ideas, money and so on (Kadushin 2012). Interestingly enough, despite the fact that social networks are such a huge part of our lives, they are hard to grasp from a personal view. Just when we try to map the people who are just one step away from being directly connected to us, things usually get too complicated for us to actually keep track of all the connections and their branchings.

In social science, networks are usually divided into three kinds: ego-centric, socio-centric and open-system networks. Ego-centric networks are networks where the connections revolve around a single node, for example an instagram account and every account that follows this

particular account. Socio-centric networks are the networks that have “box” parameters. Connections between workers, kids in kindergarten or similar are ideal environments for the study of the more fine points of network structure (Kadushin 2012). The last kind, the open system networks are recognized as networks where the boundaries are not clear.
It is mostly within the socio-centric and open system networks we are likely to locate the realm of viral art, although all three kinds play a part in the distribution of an object like a digital artwork.

Perhaps one of the most interesting qualities of social networks and social media, is the fact that the Internet-based media is close to being a seamless extension or supplementation of our other social networks. Our locally based network of persons was first expanded by the introduction of the Internet and was then later merged and extended by the introduction of mobile phones with Internet connection and social media apps like Facebook, Messenger and Twitter. The combination of these things gives our social network a lot more room for both expansion, mobility and flexibility. With only a relatively small number of “friends” on your Facebook page and with the assumption that none of these are friends with each other (which is hardly ever the case in real life though), then by three steps removed from you, you already have access to a million people if you have 100 friends (Kadushin 2012). Off course this is more or less the same in real life as well, but when you add social media and the Internet in the mix, then the possibility of actually reaching out to a very large number of individuals in a relatively short amount of time is significantly easier and quicker than by the old fashioned analog ways of communication.

Understanding social networks is crucial when it comes to building a theoretical understanding as to how a viral event or topic gets spread. In relation to art (as with anything else) it is not sufficient for it to have qualities that (in theory) can be appreciated by consumers. You have to have some sort of system or network offering a way of interacting with individuals as well as forwarding or distributing whatever you want mediated.
This is where the true power of the social networks lies. Because it is within these social networks, the part that operates through social media, that we find the actual nodes and information highways where all the shared content actually get around. Viral events or topics are no different than everything else that gets passed on through networks. They depend on the connections between individuals in order to get around. In this way, social networks are

what gives new life, or in this sense, provides new information to the constant online flow, and we as individuals are all contributors.

3.1.1 Networks as conduits

As quoted by Charles Kadushin in his book "Understanding Social Networks": "Networks are conduits of both wanted and unwanted flows." (Kadushin 2012, 8). This is perhaps one of the biggest challenges when it comes to viral marketing and information filtering in general. The amount of information flowing between people is staggering, and to have something standing out in a information sea of this size, is hard even if the product is extraordinary both in content and presentation (Nahon and Hensley 2013). Kadushin (2012) also presents some of the major propositions of social networks, like homophily (people with similar characteristics tend to be connected with each other) and influence (the way connected people have a tendency to have an effect on one another). These propositions go hand in hand with the bridging of the different social networks, sub-networks or so-called "clusters".

We seem to have a tendency to influence each others behaviour when we hang out with other individuals. Our ideas have a tendency to share traits with the people we are surrounded by on a day-to-day basis. If we start to compare ourselves with those closest to us, most of us will find that even though we have friends or family close to us that don't necessarily share a whole lot in common with us, there's always something that resonates with our own ideas and how we experience the world that makes us want to be around a person. In this way, sharing as an important way of connecting and building communities has been around since the dawn of mankind, and is a part of the foundation from stamp collectors to political parties and even nations. Clusters come in a wide range of sizes.

Here it is also necessary to bring in Jürgen Habermas and his theory of communicative action. This theory approaches a concept of reason not grounded in instrumental or objectivistic terms, but rather in an emancipatory communicative act. In communicative action, Habermas is under the impression of rationality as a capacity inherent within the language, and can especially be found in the form of argumentation (McCarthy 1984). Argumentation for Habermas, seems to be a term for a form of speech, where the validity of any claim is tested against vindicating or criticising arguments. In relation to communicative action, it is understood as an oriented processes of interaction and coordination between two or more individuals, where the action is based upon agreed interpretations of the situation

(McCarthy 1984). A very open definition of communicative action is that it is action in which the participants strive to reach an understanding of a situation and how to react and act in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement. This belief that individuals participate in a conversational process that constructs rationality, validates truth and criticizes formal structures or institutions of power in our society, is fundamental to understanding social networks. And in many ways, the public setting of many of the online social media platforms is the ideal speech situation that Habermas envisioned, where one can conversate openly and freely.

Approaching it from a viral perspective, the theory of communicative action together with clusters and social network theory, helps us to understand how something is spread inside a social network. According to Nahon and Hensley (2013), viral events/topics have the tendency to spread within groups of people that know each other rather well and share similar interests or taste, and this is what enables the quick spread of content in the form of messages or sharing. As an example, within the cluster of a politician, it is very likely that he or she has several other close contacts or strong ties, that are also politicians belonging to the same political party or dedicate a lot of their time to politics. Within this cluster then, forwarded messages regarding politics and the political party that the politician is a member of, will be spread rather fast between the individuals and reach everyone quickly.

But social networks cannot possibly consist of only strong ties. As we interact with people in many different ways in our life, we end up with connections of different importance to us (which can also change over time). Individuals that don't share that many strong interests or connections end up further away from us and make up the outer borders of our cluster. But these weak ties play an important role in our social networks as well. It is between the network holes where links are few that we find the individuals in our own and others networks. These form the outer periphery of the clusters and bridge them together with other clusters. In other words, most new content that travel to and from a network cluster come from our weak ties that have connections to other clusters of individuals that we ourselves are not part of (Nahon and Hensley 2013). The reason for this is simple: If we are exposed to content from a weak tie that we like and reshare, there is a greater likelihood that some of the individuals in our own cluster will like it but have not yet seen it, than if the content was reshared from someone within our own cluster. The reason for this is related to how a cluster gets saturated by shared content all the time.

The definition of saturation of a network in this thesis does not imply that everyone within it have seen or engaged with the information that has been shared, but rather that the potential of resharing and forwarding has been maxed out. As you might have noticed, not everyone within your cluster reshares everything that is of interest. Some hardly ever share or post anything, which can probably be ascribed to personality and different primary preferences, or other underlying causes. But this does not necessarily mean that people that don't share or forward information have no interest in the information itself.

When talking about sharing, virality and networks, the term "interest" seems to come up a lot, which isn't that strange at all. Interest works as a common connective tool and can together with a viral event form so-called "interest networks" revolved around the shared interest in the event. Most often, bonds like these seem to be temporal relative to the life span of the viral event, but can in some situations form longer lasting social networks focusing on specific topics arising from a viral event (Hemsley and Mason 2012).

Interest is also related to the filtering process of forwarded information, sometimes called "filter-forwarding" (Shirky 2009) or "network gatekeeping" (Barzilai-Nahon 2008). When information gets dropped into the digital realm of social media and begins to travel through the networks through sharing or forwarding, the filtration process is inevitable (but can probably be moderated to a certain degree depending on the type of information) for the very reason of different taste and interest. When it comes to viral art, interest together with influence is perhaps the strongest driving force on social media. If we chose to share artwork we find interesting, the purpose of the very action of sharing most often comes back to this. This however is not necessarily the case for the very artists themselves, as they are more oriented around sharing and exposure in a more distributional oriented way in order to get their art "out there".

3.1.2 Networks and the gatekeepers

Within any network, there will be some kind of regulation of the flow of the content. This process where information is filtered through for further dissemination, whether it's for publication, broadcasting, the Internet, or other modes of communication, is called gatekeeping. The concept of gatekeeping was first introduced and coined by social psychologist Kurt Lewin in his article *Frontiers in Group Dynamics: II. Channels of Group*

Life; Social Planning and Action Research (1947), and is now found in multiple fields of studies like communication studies and sociology. However, despite the term's popularity in many fields, there seems to be little agreement on its meaning and lack of status as a fully developed theory. Furthermore, attention to gatekeeping in the context of information and networks is rare, but can be found in Karine Barzilai-Nahon's article about gatekeeping theory from 2008, and Pamela J. Shoemaker and Timothy Vos's book *Gatekeeping theory* from 2009. Gatekeeping is also something found on all levels of media structure, and can be both human or machine by nature. The "gate" in gatekeeping refers to an entrance to or exit from a network or its section, and works like a passagepoint (Barzilai-Nahon 2008). However, gatekeeping or more importantly the gatekeepers defined here as something that controls information as it moves through a gate, are the most interesting and relevant in relation to virality and viral art.

When your e-mail program separates your spam mail from the rest of your inbox, so that you won't have to open up mails from all those Nigerian princes, a form of gatekeeping is performed by the software or algorithms. Every day news channels receives various news content from all over the world, and based on the ethics and policies within the news channels, the content is sorted and evaluated for publication. This sorting is usually done by the editor, making him/her the gatekeeper in this scenario. And every time you decide whether to share something on social media platforms like facebook, you are essentially performing gatekeeping, by deciding if something is good enough to meet your own standards as well as the standards of your network. In this way gatekeeping can also be said to be very subjective, or rather the decisions of the gatekeepers can be highly subjective. The gatekeepers performs activities that include among others selection, addition, withholding, display, channeling, shaping, manipulation, repetition, timing, localization, integration, disregard, and deletion of information (Barzilai-Nahon 2008). This means that before any content actually reaches the public, it is analyzed by someone or something. The result of this is that the gatekeepers can be potentially powerful and influential, whether machine or human, especially in the 21st century, where information is capital and intricate and sophisticated network technology is becoming increasingly fundamental in our everyday lives and actions. Gatekeepers are also inevitable within social and technological networks, as they are the ones who are responsible for the dynamics and flow within networks, preventing chaos as a result of information overflow.

The concept of homophily as introduced by Lazarfield and Merton is in a formal way a description of matching characteristics between people in a population or network that are proportionally greater than expected, resulting in a higher probability of them being connected (Verbrugge 1977). When trying to achieve an understanding of the relation between different types of art in the digital realm, virality and how it moves online, the social networks and homophily can work as a guideline regarding all of these terms. Based on our understanding of social networks we can say that art in the digital, as well as in the analog realm, is both relative and somewhat of an acquired taste and is built on interest, or rather common or shared interest or characteristics. As with social networks, homophily as a principle can be applied to everything from small groups to nations or countries and is applied whenever we need to put a searchlight on what kind of object in form of characteristics that make some individuals more connected than others.

It is logical then to apply homophily to art in a context like this thesis, because art plays the leading role together with virality and plays the part of shared characteristics between individuals. In big online social networks like Facebook with its 1.9 billion active monthly users (Statista 2017), we are most likely to find several types of network clusters that have a focus on art and artworks in different degrees of priority. Depending on an individual's characteristics, these clusters will influence either the strong or the weak ties within each and everybody's cluster thereby defining the position of clusters built around characteristics that accentuate forwarded messages related to art or artworks.

But which characteristics, attributes or activities can be selected when attempting to pick out candidates for homophily in relation to the examples applied in this thesis? Homophily in relation to art on an individual level can be described to common attributes such as co-location and commonly situated activities, but statue and value-homophily are also important. Status-homophily can be ascribed or acquired and encompass characteristics or attributes such as age, race, sex, marital status and education, while value-homophily describes connection through attitudes, stereotypes etc. etc. Kadushin (2012) list two kinds of causes of homophily: Common norms or values may bring nodes with common attributes together, or it can work in reverse so that common attributes and contacts may lead to common norms. The other kind, is structural location, where bodies may have same attributes as a result of them both operating in the same area. This also goes the other way around (Feld and Carter 1998). Structural location is interesting because it explains why similar pairs have a tendency to

form a relationship and linked with availability as a social structure, explains the creation of interest clusters of people. In other words. structural location attempts to explain why we are more likely to find people interested in weightlifting and hypertrophy in for instance a bodybuilding event, than in a exhibition for cat lovers.

So there seems to be at least four processes involved when people flock together (Kadushin 2012): 1) the same kinds of people come together 2) the influence of people around us makes us even more alike 3 and 4) people end up in the same place and get influenced by the very place they are located.

So why is this important to viral artworks? Depending on the interest or popularity of the different artworks, their maximum potential (in numbers) for going viral is relative to their relevance to common attributes and characteristics (e.g memes and pop-culture). The more niche they are, the probability for it to have a big audience in the first place is proportionally small. The concept of people being drawn to a specific object and thereby more likely to attend events or classes related to the object seems pretty easy to understand, but it gets a bit more complicated when we try to introduce homophily in relation to collectives. The reason for this is that at an organisational level, the likelihood of a tie based on similarity is also depending on the type or kind of connection established. Kadushin (2012) applies examples of the automobile manufacturers that are geographically co-located and share common characteristics, but don't sell cars to one another, but on the other hands become linked together by the engineers and managers that often move between the companies. In other words the result of many layers of connections between several individuals can sometimes make the more obvious connections distracting or misleading. This however only makes homophily an even more important term when we look at the examples of virality and viral art used in and around the 2016 US presidential election.

3.2 Deleuze and the societies of control

Gilles Deleuze's *Postscript on the Societies of Control* (1992), is based on a transition from Michel Foucault's disciplinary society to the societies of control, a society presenting itself as a place with seemingly much more freedom, no longer restrained by enclosure structures like school or factories. Modern technology like computers, cell phones and the Internet encourage us to pursue our desires more freely, by giving us opportunities like online

education and working from home. If we are living in societies of control today, then the Web especially plays an important part in it, as Deleuze's theory is based on the shift from enclosed structures, to an increasingly sophisticated network of entangled systems. The downside to this is that it comes with a kind of monitored, disciplinary trading system that is hard to break out from. The fluidity of the previously enclosed structures, now demand you to be available almost everywhere you go 24/7. This illusion of freedom, Deleuze says, comes with the cost of never actually finalising anything, from work, the corporation, the educational system and so on. Also, he adds, is the transformation of individuals to "dividuals" that contribute with floating rates of exchange to the network with data as currency (Deleuze 1992). The understanding of code and passwords as evidence of a transfer from disciplinary societies to societies of control and as functions of numerical language control is also important. Signatures and enrollments are the old disciplinary ways of main identification, whereas the password is the representation of the individual in societies of control, that also functions as a base foundation for the data mining of individuals (Deleuze 1992).

Deleuze's description of the control society written in the early 90's seem to have become very close to our present reality in many ways, as the discussion around surveillance, data monitoring and increasingly complex networks brought to life with modern technology, is becoming more and more relevant for the average individual living in the western world. The absence of true "free time", meaning the free time that takes place outside the structures of power is evident in our online presentness. We are expected to be available 24/7, and apps like Facebook and their Messenger app have icons that tell us if we're active or not to our friends and family who are also Facebook users. Messenger and Email systems don't have regular downtime settings in their design, as you can get in contact with people whenever you feel like it. Actually, the Internet itself is continuously running and always there to serve its purpose to you, and track whatever you do. Today's Big Brother system works slightly different than Foucault's Panopticon. Instead of a centralized focal point of surveillance, we have complicated matrix of information gathering algorithms acting out the role of tracking and encoding our actions, ranging and arranging them in lists of normal or unacceptable behaviour (Crain 2013). In short, there seems to be some kind of an exchange ratio between freedom and control of our activities, with the normalization of surveillance being one of the most evident signs of this evolution of the panopticon.

It is important to note that not all of our society have transformed to this new form, as traditional disciplinary structures are still very much present in the prison and school systems. Nevertheless we see signs of this shift in societal structure and can acknowledge Deleuze's theory of societies of control as changes that imply a third historical stage of power and control distribution, with the sovereign and disciplinary societies being the previous stages. Examples of critique to Deleuze's theory of the societies of control can be found in Wendy Hui Kyong Chun's introduction to *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (2006) and Alexander R. Galloway and Eugene Thacker's *The Exploit* (2007). Both seem to base their critique on arguments based on overestimating the power of control systems, thereby either granting them the illusion of controlling our lives more than they do, or pointing to the need of insisting on the failures and actual operations of technology in order to fight the control systems and the society of control in itself.

3.2.1 Societies of control in relation to art and propaganda.

In his book *What is philosophy?*, Deleuze presents art as having a natural form, describing it in a very neurological approach as an inhabitant of the sensations (Deleuze 1991). Art must be understood as sensations that have the ability to materialize and become expressive that makes room for new sensations, resulting in a form of self-sufficient mode of existence. This also makes art autonomous and not under the control of communication and information (Deleuze and Guattari 1991).

"Sensations, percepts and affects, are beings whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived. They could be said to exist in the absence of man because man, as he is caught in stone, on the canvas, or by words, is himself a compound of percepts and affects. The work of art is a being of sensation and nothing else: it exists in itself" (Deleuze and Guattari 1991, 164).

This quote sums up art in the Deleuzian way as something perceived as an independent sensation, or block of sensation that surpasses man and extends the expressive qualities of the object. This again leads up to the functions of art in societies of control.
In the article *Art and Political Resistance in (and to) the Societies of Control. A Flight through Deleuze*, author Marilé di Filippo analyzes the potential of art to become a form of resistance to the dynamics of control societies. Di Filippo builds upon the understanding of art as sensations that give rise to new ways of seeing, hearing and feeling, arguing that these

qualities are the ones needed to build a presumption of politics. This approach, di Filippo continues, can be able to distort the dominant discursive logic and make art in the vision of Deleuze work in relation to political procedure (di Filippo 2012).

When it comes to art then, Deleuze seems to view art as a possible form of resistance against the societies of control, where creation as a function is used as means of escaping and as a way of non-communicating bubbles of resistances to communication and information (di Filippo 2012).

Viral art is linked to propaganda art as well. Propaganda and art is perhaps recognized and associated by most with World War I World War II and the Cold War, where nationalities like the U.S, Germany and Soviet applied it in relation to recruitment, engagement and encouragement. This is also perhaps the reason why the word "propaganda" has somewhat of a negative or sinister connotation. In Toby Clark's book *Art and Propaganda*, Clark points out the contrast between propaganda and art how propaganda art can seem very contradictory for some (Clark 1997). He explains this with the term propaganda and its ties to the ideological struggles of the twentieth century, noting that the word propaganda was used as a more or less neutral term associated and applied together with the dissemination of political beliefs, religious evangelism and commercial advertising in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Clark 1997). After the First World War, propaganda was no longer seen as a neutral. The reason for this was that the governments at war realized that they had to come up with the use of non-conventional means to recruit enough people to replace the soldiers killed on the battlefield. The result of this was the use of art and mass communication to produce and distribute content published in cheap newspapers, posters, and cinema (Clark 1997). This use of art in mass production in relation to politics and propaganda was later even more refined in the Cold War and continued to build the foundation of the negative connotations propaganda suffers from today. This was also further emphasized by critics like Clement Greenberg, who began to defend and distinguish "true art" from the "kitsch" and American mass culture, which included propaganda art, paving way for modernism and the avant-garde as examples of art immune to political exploitation and liberated from groups like governments and churches (Greenberg 1939).

With the introduction of the Internet and after Web 2.0, art and propaganda seem to have expanded its playground, and maybe inhabiting viral art more than we would like to

acknowledge. In order to understand this link between viral art and propaganda, it is necessary to introduce a social theory framework related directly to the terms. American sociologist, historian, civil rights activist, and author of the official magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, often wrote about art and especially art in relation to the colored people, one of these being that of art and propaganda. Du Bois treated art as a very powerful and structural tool. In their article *Art as Propaganda: Bringing Du Bois into the Sociology of Art*, authors Dustin Kidd and Christina Jackson examine Du Bois writings in *The Crisis* with a social theory approach. Here they point out that Du Bois describes art as a tool that functions as building blocks within our social world (Kidd and Jackson 2010). Du Bois's view on art is also focused on playing a role in social change, especially when it comes to propaganda in art as creative or aesthetic expression that is directed toward racial conflict. Considering that Du Bois made these contributions in the early nineteenth century, he most likely regarded propaganda in the more neutral way (which is also mentioned by Kidd and Jackson), in a world still yet to see the propaganda machine as it became during the Second World War and Cold War.

3.3 Alexander Galloway and the interface effect.

In *The interface effect*, Alexander Galloway presents a broad and interesting theory on the infrastructural role perpetual mediation has in today's society. He argues that an interface is not something stable, but rather a multiplicity of processes (Galloway 2012). In other words, the interface goes well beyond that which we can visually perceive. For Galloway, the interface is not just a screen on a cellphone or a laptop, but goes beyond that, and requires one to understand the interface as more than just a "thing". This way of thinking about interfaces is a departure from the more common object-centered approach regarding how we view media in the first place present in different forms in the writings of people like Marshall McLuhan and Friedrich Kittler. We see that Galloway's method shifts attention from the stable interface objects, like the many different screens we use to access digital content, to dynamic interface processes, where a computer from this perspective, is a process of translation between the many different processes or states. This is different from the perhaps more common view on computers as merely media machines that standardize and formats all types of media. It also explains how the interface (from Galloway's point of view) cannot be considered as an object, but rather an effect that takes place beyond that of the screens on our devices.

This different approach to media involves another interesting element, namely that of politics. Galloway's definition of politics is rather broad though, and includes the organization of a common world, both through state governance and in relations among actors within our daily lives, such as families, work environments, and other social forms (Galloway 2012). The reason why politics is important to understand the interface effect Galloway claims, is that political interpretation is unavoidable. Politics in relation to the discussions of the concrete uses of new media is something fundamental (Galloway 2012)**.**

3.3.1 Coherent and incoherent aesthetics and politics

In *The infterface effect,* Galloway also points out the important relation between coherence and incoherence together with the interface, and presents some general observations about these concepts and their relationship together with politics. First, he presents the terminology, where coherence and incoherence compose "a sort of continuum, which one might contextualize within the twin domains of the aesthetic and the political (Galloway 2012). The complete list is that of four different renderings, which are as follows:

(1) The "coherent aesthetic". It's the one that "works" according to Galloway (2012), and points to the gravitation of the coherent aesthetics tends toward the center of the work of art. It is a process of centering, of gradual coalescing around a specific being. Examples of this may be found broadly across many media. Galloway points towards Barthes' concept of the studium as a basic technique for this rendering.

(2) An "incoherent aesthetic" is by contrast to the first, one that doesn't work. Here Galloway describes gravity as "not a unifying force but a force of degradation, tending to unravel neat masses into their unkempt, incontinent elements." (Galloway 2012, 47). Additionally, he stresses that "Incoherent" is not to be understood as something normatively negative, and that the point is not that the aesthetic is unrepresentable or unwatchable. Also, coherence and incoherence works as attributes to the capacity of forces within the object and whether they tend to fuse or disperse. In this second mode, Galloway appoints the punctum as the correct heuristic.

(3) In this rendering, the aesthetic is replaced by the political. "Coherent politics" in this setting refers to the tendency to organize around a central formation, producing stable institutions,

with centers of operations, known fields and capacities for regulating the flow of bodies and languages (Galloway 2012). Also, coherent politics include highly precise languages for the articulation of social beings, and their existence may be seen in different existing political systems like fascism and national socialism, but also liberal democracy.

(4) The fourth and last combination, the so-called "incoherent politics" is described by Galloway as having a tendency to dissolve existing institutional bonds (Galloway 2012). Where coherent politics can come under the name of “territorialization”, incoherent politics is associated with “deterritorialization”, or what some would label “radical democracy”. Incoherent politics is something that breaks with the present by renovating the very meaning of desire itself.

These four types of coherent and incoherent politics are useful when approaching viral art in a wider context, as the characteristics of any content can be labeled under these four types and their four different combinations or modes, highlighting the different forces that play within viral art and politics. By doing so, we see that we are already on our way to perceive interfaces as allegorical devices. "Unedited smartphone aesthetic pics" (USAP), a secret Facebook group where members post images of moments, displays and phenomena that members have witnessed or created on their smartphones, comes to mind when addressing this topic. In this group many of the members arrange or compose their images to different degrees in order to extract specifically aesthetically intriguing photos. Unlike the popular trend of adding filters or photo editing programs and apps to images in order to achieve a different desired effect, the USAP genre do not.

One of the most famous users of this group is Adam Hillman, known as witenry on Instagram where he has over a hundred thousand followers. One of his most viral piece of art is “Netflix and Chill”, a picture of Hillman’s own laptop with the screen covered in ice cubes, that plays with the pop cultural slang term of using an invitation to watch Netflix together as a euphemism for sex (figure 4). Hillmans images revolve around creating abstract arrangements, utilizing a time-consuming, pattern-oriented style and working within the aesthetic format of the smartphone camera technology. Hillman, like many other image-artists today, uses Instagram as his main sharing platform. In addition to the smartphone technology not being quite as high quality as that of a DSLR cameras (though some smartphone models are closing in), Instagram’s image quality is relatively lo-res and the

format is mainly designed for viewing on smartphones and tablets. This combination together with the online social networks makes it a good example of pushing art forward by adopting and merging new technology that also comes with its own limitations. These limitations is something artists on Instagram have to be aware of, as they can contribute to both good and bad end results depending on the approach. Something that looks good from a more physical perspective, doesn't necessarily translate well after being uploaded online. But in Hillman's case with the USAP art, the result is very often a highly coherent aesthetic, one that is centered around the abstract, but pattern-oriented style. This trademark style is also something that makes the pictures work, and come of as very pleasing to watch, like his "watercolor" picture, depicting a plate with M&M's arranged in a colorful pattern (figure 5).

Figure 4: "Netflix and chill" By Hillman

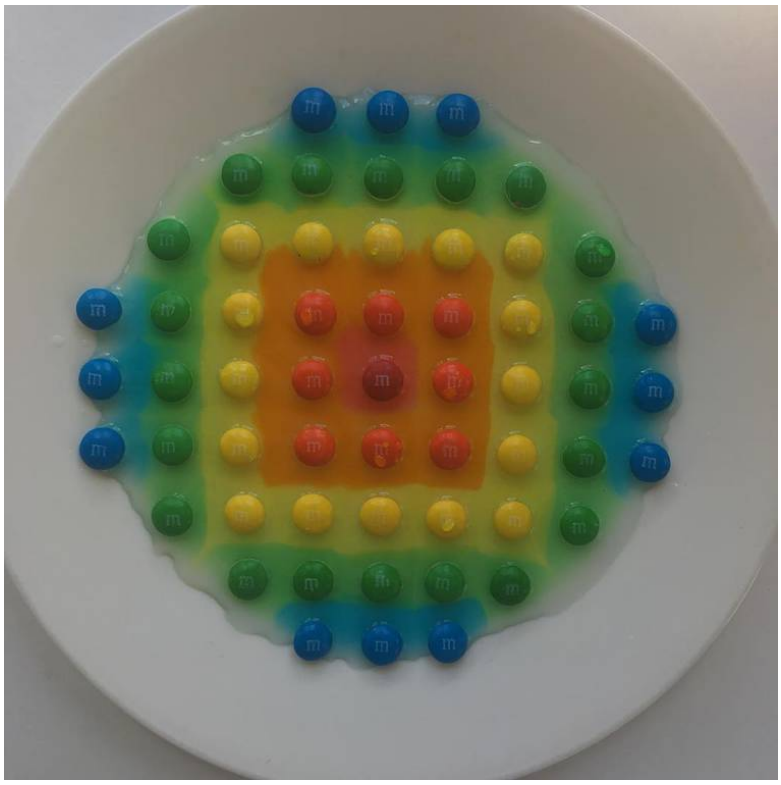

Figure 5: Hillman's "Watercolor"

It is also an interesting example of how different social networks can react in different ways to the same content. After his "Netflix and chill" photo got uploaded on imgur, Hillman noted a difference in how his art was perceived for a more general public compared to the audience in the USAP group (Song 2016). Where the majority of the group members in USAP focused on the artistry and concept of the piece, the general public seemed to have a more trivial approach to it by focusing on the fact that Hillman most likely had ruined his laptop by putting ice cubes on the screen (Song 2016). The reason for this may be that the artwork laid the foundation for the pun in the public eye, playing on a more general appreciation for humour rather than aesthetic art or even the artistic aspect of viral art as a whole, while it worked in a opposite way for the USAP users that are members of a very interest specific group. This can also be linked to the coherent/incoherent aesthetics and politics, where the interest specific politics of the USAP group collides with the one we find in the general public. We see then that the context is also essential in order to understand the coherent/incoherent politics, as the different layers of viral content doesn't necessarily work in a top to bottom fashion.

Throughout *The Interface Effect*, Galloway keeps coming back to the notion of the interface effect as an allegory. Interfaces as allegorical devices can be applied as a way of thinking or interpretation of the many layers of new media. Perhaps the best example that he refers to in the book, is the layout of the display for the Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game *World of Warcraft*. Regarded as one of the world's most popular games at its peak, *World of Warcraft* is a fantasy-themed virtual world that, at its most popular moment, claimed a community of approximately 12 million monthly subscribers who spent a hefty amount of hours a week in its virtual world (Chiang 2010). As pointed out by Galloway, *World of Warcraft* is a complex online world, that even contains within itself numerous other smaller games, and an almost dizzying amount of objectives and activities that the player can choose to engage with, or not. "At root, the game is not simply a fantasy landscape of dragons and epic weapons but a factory floor, an information-age sweatshop, custom tailored in every detail for cooperative ludic labor." (Galloway 2012, 44). In this, Galloway suggest that the interface effect used as an allegorical device can help us reveal the multiple political processes within a digital environment. By analyzing the screen image with which the *World of Warcraft* player interacts, we also see that it tells us something about the political form of a computer-generated world. The shifting from 2D icons around the corners of the screen and into the 3D world in the center of the image also suggest that there's an interplay of layers that play on the labor done within the 3D world of *World of Warcraft* and reveals some of the layers of the interface effect as an allegorical device (Galloway 2012).

So how does this relate to virality and viral art? Well for starters, virality from the very origin of the term is something that can prove hard to actually objectify, but that doesn't mean that people don't. We seem to approach virality in the object-oriented way when we address its need of a carrier in order to actually manifest. While originally related to diseases, virality today, as a result of its merging with new media (especially in pop-culture), is perhaps more associated as an effect. This is not that strange considering that an effect is generally associated as something that is produced by an agency or cause; result; consequence. In this fashion, virality seems to have retracted back to a more neutral and basic origin and terminology than before. By tracking virality back to its need of a carrier, we can examine viral art as an object-oriented term by fault or even default, as a result of the absence of opposition or a better alternative in society. In other words, viral art is mostly understood as

something that is directly connected to our screens on a day-to-day basis, or rather, the interfaces we orient towards. Additionally, viral art appears in abundant quantities online and is becoming heavily represented on social media platforms. And perhaps as a result of our quest for digital eye candy, we often fail to acknowledge that digital viral art is something that goes way beyond what we visually perceive. And as art and entertainment still go hand in hand most of the time, the objectification of it is perhaps faulty basic action for many as we orient our focus towards whatever the screen has to offer, by jumping from one object to the next..

With Galloway's theory of the interface effect, namely interfaces as allegorical devices, it is possible to address today's contemporary viral art and reveal some of the other layers of this genre, more precisely the politics and propaganda and how it as a process is perhaps as contemporary as art can become. This "newness" in relation to the trending characteristics that virality represents, is reflecting in how Galloway portrays today's society as a ceaselessly ongoing, never ending, communicating, content generating, remixing and modding society. This seems to be related to the key points he makes in *The interface effect*, on how to home in on the challenges of tackling, accessing and mediating a world of perpetual mediation. So we see then that when we apply Galloway's theory around the interfaces and the interfaces, we are able to approach viral art and perhaps understand it as something more. Something beyond the screens and beyond their manifestation as an object. The object-oriented way of approach to genres like viral art may also be a contributing factor to why it is hard to actually create a bulletproof formula for creating content that with a 100% certainty will go viral and saturate the networks. Perhaps we fail to understand the intricacy of the process of virality because we get to hung up on the visually aesthetic properties of the content, with visual aesthetics in this sense also relating to any cognitive process that is born when observing an object (not only what our eyes perceive, but how our mind makes sense of it).

In summary, we refer to and apply social network theory to this thesis in order to understand how viral art is able to move around in a complex structure like the Internet. Social network theory helps us understand how something, or rather anything, is spread through our connections to other individuals, forging clusters of people around ourselves, ranging from very close persons, like friends and family members, to distant contacts and even strangers. It helps us to see how viral art is based around our mutual preferences, influences and locations with many other individuals. Additionally, network theory can also be applied as an means to

an end, when it comes to understanding viral art and virality as more than just objects. This non-object-oriented approach is needed in order to better see the term(s) in relation to the bigger picture of social media and not only the various manifestations in our news feeds or messages, where these objects most frequently appear and sometimes gets re shared. Virality and viral art can be easily dismissed as short-lived content (which viral art in reality is and something we will come back later) addressing various topics and events in relation to our society and culture. But it doesn't just appear in our lives by magic, and their visual incarnations are only the tip of the iceberg of many processes as the topics and events addressed can have substantial influence and effects on society, if approached in the same way as Galloway does with the interfaces in general (Galloway 2012). To achieve a proper understanding of virality and viral art it is crucial to grasp the concepts of social network theory, especially in relation to the interplay between communities, as seen in the case of Pepe the frog and the alt-right movement, which I'll convey in detail in the discussion part later in this thesis. The reason for this is simple: Without networks and network clusters of people, viral art cannot really happen, at least not in the way we know virality as of now. It is dependent on a network in order to move around and saturate it, and with viral art, to mediate something. Without this it lacks the very base qualities that define virality.

Viral art and virality is tied to the networks and the understanding of networks as a set of relationships. In any viral event or topic, these sets of relationships, human and technological, are fused at the core with virality. When we look at the examples of viral art in the context of social change, the communities where memes like Pepe the frog originate from, can be regarded as a part of the viral artwork as well, and can tell us quite a lot about the "glue" that keeps the communities together and just why a viral artwork arose from this environment. Lastly, by understanding social network theory, it is easier to acknowledge the gatekeepers within a network and their powerful status as filtering processes that play a big part in deciding what can actually become a viral artwork. And although the concept of gatekeeping is very complicated and works on many levels, we have to consider their intervening powers for viral art in a society of control according to Deleuze, especially when we apply Galloway's interface effect theory as well.

The society of control as presented by Deleuze is a somewhat dreadful or dark illustration of a modern society, where we live out our lives pursuing a, in many ways promised but unobtainable freedom, all the while being monitored by a disciplinary trading system.

Although Deleuze's description is far from a perfect match with today's society, one of society's modern foundations and cornerstone, namely the Internet, comes very close to this, or at least signals a transfer from a more disciplinary society. And with the somewhat frequent and drastic changes regarding the regulations and data monitoring the activities of the users, the near future version of the Internet may very well end up being a textbook incarnation of Deleuze's societies of control. By analysing the examples of viral art with Deleuze's characteristics of a control society in relation to his description of art as an opposing force within it, it may be possible to acquire some clues about the direction of our society and whether viral art, with its special characteristics tied to the virality part of the artworks, can actually work as a possible form of resistance within a system with characteristics of a society of control, or if these characteristics actually works as an integrated part of the control systems (like the gatekeepers) to actually work as an opposing force on an influential level.

This approach also includes the element of propaganda often found within viral art, and propaganda art as powerful structural tools, with the ability to elevate an event, topic or even whole groups and communities from the underground or backdrop of society, into more relevant positions. Finally we apply Galloway's theory of the interface as an effect, and the importance of interfaces, not only for viral art, but as translators of the many different processes and states within today's society. This is also where the political interpretation steps in as an unavoidable outcome, and its relevance to the discussions of the concrete uses of new media is something fundamental and related to the examples applied in this thesis.

4 Untangling virality and viral art

4.1 Web 2.0 and the ambiguity of social media as a business and content sharing platform

To start off with the origin of today's virality term we need to go back in time, to the earlier days of the Web and the rise of the platforms within the networks that virality seems to thrive in. The Internet is and has always been constantly evolving and growing, but somewhere along the timeline an important shift happened in how the Internet was used. This event later coined Web 2.0 has become the framework for how we use Internet today, and in relation to virality, the addition of social media platforms is perhaps the biggest and most important part of this revolution.

Both of these terms are relatively new, but the amount of marketing literature around these topics has already become quite large. Following the diverse literature is disagreement of what exactly defines Web 2.0 and social media. A general compact definition of Web 2.0 from one of the originators of the term, namely Tim O'Reilly defines Web 2.0 as:
"The network as platform, spanning all connected devices; Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an "architecture of participation," and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences." (O'Reilly 2005). Looking at this definition the emphasis placed on the transformation from passive consumer, to active producer is evident when compared to the Web 1.0 experience. The origin of the World Wide Web in 1991 as a result of the connection of hypertext technology to the Internet, was a much more passive introduction of a new type of networked communication (van Dijk 2013). The reason for this has a lot to do with the fact that the World Wide Web in its early days had not yet developed services that could automatically connect you with other users. Weblogs, list-servers and email services worked in a more "offline" way than now, in the way that very often, you were in need of some kind of analog correspondence in order to get someone's email address or join a group. You did not get suggestions for people to link up with like Facebook does for you now, and

communication happened within bubbles that had a lot less connections to other types of social media.

The word “remix” is also very fundamental, in that the data we contribute, as well as get exposed to, is an ever expanding cluster where we are entwined with the information contributed by the rest of the users, humans as well as algorithms. Another way to look at Web 2.0, is as collection of services (Wyrwoll 2014), where social media is perhaps the best example where everyone can be both author and reader at the same time, with the potential to reach out to many people in a matter of short time. The blossoming of platforms in the late 1990’s to the early 2000’s like Blogger, Wikipedia, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube offered a wide array of new web tools, resulting in new web tactics, quickly being embraced by the increasing users and contributors to the web. These tools are the reason why we can consider Web 2.0 to be the platform for the evolution of social media.

When it comes to social media, the term can be hard to define when several types of technology come together and shape a concept. Another important factor is the constant evolving of new technology added to the bunch, and the fascinating speed this is happening at (Wildman and Obar 2015). The first form of social media that emerged with the creation of the USENET in 1979, an Internet-based network of discussion groups (Encyclopædia Britannica 2017) laid out the basic foundation of social media today, but without the diversity the tools of Web 2.0 introduced, which led to increasingly interconnected social media platforms today. There are no clear boundaries and the different types are seemingly part of a stream, where new technologies in relation to the wide PC and mobile phone-platforms lead the way to the next versions of social media based on the consumers.

One way to look at social media from a pure technical term is to describe the foundation as communication, interaction and creational tools within Web 2.0 in relation to user relationships (Hausman, 2012) and ideology around the user as both producer and consumer (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The focus on User Generated Content (UGC) created with the internet applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 is also a similar definition that is used about social media (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). A different approach attempts to tackle with the fact that UGC is not endemic to social media, and can exist without the connection or personal communication that the platforms of today. This definition argues that social media are: “networked database platforms that combine

public with personal communication". This last definition made by Graham Meikle, Professor of Communication and Digital Media at the University of Westminster, and writer of the book *Social Media: Communication, Sharing, And Visibility* (2016, 6), stand out as one of the more clearly defined in recent times. His use of keywords (networked, database, platform, public and personal communication) as an attempt to point to different aspects of the complexity of social media, is straightforwardly and useful. Also they go hand in hand with this thesis focus on networks and their technological systems and the embodied ideas about social organization and cultural aspect of social media, as well as the business models aspect and the exploitation of users through networked digital media. It is however necessary to delve further into the different types of social media and especially the most popular ones where we find virality at its most grandeur.

4.1.1 Different flavors of social media

Today, there are several different types of social media: The already mentioned UGC and Social Networks Sites (SNS's) are the biggest and most relevant for this thesis. SNS's are primarily based around the promotion of individual or group based interpersonal contact, that forge personal, professional, or geographical connections and encourage weak ties (van Dijk 2013). Two of the most well-known examples are Facebook and Twitter, where users in a cluster very often are connected on a personal basis in some way, but at the same time don't have to be. UGC sites differs from SNS's in the way that they promote or support creativity, foreground cultural activity whether it's professional or amateur content (van Dijk 2013). Examples of UGC sites are Youtube and Wikipedia, where users usually come together based on common interests. The other most common types of social media are trading and marketing sites (TMS's) that are based around exchanging or selling products (Amazon, eBay, Craigslist and so on), and so called play and game sites (PGS) offering games like Farmville and Angry Birds (van Dijk 2013), where any personal interaction is either within the gaming world, outside of it or both.

Some of the biggest and most commonly used social media platforms, are social networks like Facebook and Twitter, video portals like Youtube and Vimeo, and image oriented apps like Instagram. These platforms provided with the tools of Web 2.0 also have in common that they are fairly easy to use for everyone, enabling easy sharing and publishing of content to other users, something that earlier broadcasting devices never had (Wyrwoll 2014). The arrival of these new and interactive media platforms resulted in many predictions regarding

the future of Internet culture. Between 2000 and 2006 many media theorists claimed that these new tools exponentially enhanced the natural human need to connect and create, declaring early victory for the user (van Dijk 2013). This focus on the individual and the web companies alleged mission to benefit the common good, like Zuckerberg's statement, that Facebook wants to help people find what they want and connect them to ideas they like online, seems likely to continue into the future.

In addition to the focus on the individual the very word "social" used together with media, implies a user-centered focus of the platforms, and that they facilitate communal activities, very much like the term "participatory" emphasizes human collaboration (van Dijck 2013). Van Dijk argues that social media can be seen as online facilitators or human networks enhancers, in the way that individual ideas, values and tastes are contagious and spread through these online social networks (van Dijk 2013). The interactive and participatory potential of social media as a result of the built in two-way communication makes it easy for the platforms to advertise their products as seemingly free to use. Another interesting advertising aspect is the difference in democratic social media as opposed to the old (one-way) media. A way that platforms perhaps undermine the commercial aspect of their social media products is the use of concepts like "collaborative" and "co-develop" when reaching out to or talking about their users. While the early days of platforms like Youtube and Flickr indeed were depending on community initiatives, carried out by fans of video and photo-sharing technology, the transfer to the commercial realm happened quite some time ago.

Looking at it from an Internet marketing perspective, innovative tools like social media have been a very good thing. The list of possible actions in relation to Web 2.0 vary from watching videos, playing games, joining many and vastly different communities, taking polls, voting on content and posting comments, everything done via one of the types of social media platforms. The content created by users online can be viewed as an alternative news source with the potential to reach a vast number of people if considered relevant (Wyrwoll 2014). These effects and possibilities make it hard to argue against the fact that social media play a very important and visible role in the society of today. But the number of active users on the different platforms of social media like Facebook with 1.9 billion (Statista 2017) and 1 billion users on Youtube (Youtube 2017) results in tremendous amounts of information sharing, and the new challenges with sorting and evaluating the usefulness of these huge numbers is up to the users themselves (Wyrwoll 2014).

4.1.2 Social media and sharing: the power of sharing culture

In social media, *sharing* can be said to be the foundation of these platforms, next to *connectivity*. Other would even go so far as to single it out as the core of social media. One of them is Meikle, who writes that: "The word share is at the heart of social media. It appears as both a link and an imperative verb under every Facebook post, every YouTube video, every story on the websites of the Daily Mail or The New York Times." (Meikle 2016, 24). We are not simply using social media only to watch and read content for ourselves (most of us at least), but to pass it along to other people that we are in contact with.

Looking at the structure of Facebook and Twitter, there are several ways on how to share content: On Facebook you can choose to post it via the public message system in your personal livefeed/profile, or if you want to share it in a private manner, then you can do so by using the Messenger chat system. Either way you always have the option to just click on the Share button whenever you come by content that you feel is worthy of resharing. The introduction of the share button happened on 31 October 2006, Facebook wrote in a public blog entry that from this day, links to share on Facebook could be found all across the Internet, from news articles to Photobucket (Facebook 2013). The implementation of this type of functionality made sharing a much easier and streamlined experience for the users, and attributed to the bridging/connectivity of content in a new way. With the addition of the share button as links back to Facebook all over the web, sharing reached new heights as the glue that sticks everything together, masking any distant feeling by the introduction of a small icon. This function however relies heavily on another feature introduced the same year, namely the news feed, in which friends' activities were collated into a shared space for the first time. With Facebook's news feed it is easy to access content shared by people that you are friends with, as the feed continuously updates, adding new content like a stream. Before the introduction of the news feed, you would have to visit the profile of your friends in order to see what they've been doing lately, limiting the potential of spreading any content shared on your page.

The addition of a news feed and a share button is undoubtedly a revolution in streamlining the process of sharing in social media, and it's hard to imagine the status of Facebook as reigning champion of SNS's today without these implementations. Sharing content on Twitter is similar, in that you have two ways of tweeting content: the protected way and the unprotected way. When using the protected way, you have to have a public profile that makes

all your tweets visible, even to all the users who aren't yet following you and that allows anyone to follow you without pre-approval. Conversely though, by having a private profile you protect your tweets so that only those whom you've approved as followers are able to see them. This is also where there's a difference when it comes to sharing between Facebook and Twitter, because having a private profile on Twitter also means that none of your tweets can be re-tweeted (even by people following you) using Twitter's re-tweet feature, which is the equivalent to Facebook's Share button, thus removing the possibility of a viral event or topic emerging. In reality, this means that virality on Twitter takes place the unprotected way, but this is most likely the case with Facebook and the public sharing as well, even though you have more private options. The answer to this is most likely related to the reach and speed factor being greater when something gets published publicly for everyone to see, versus from one person to another via private chatting (although both are important contributors), the latter perhaps a slightly outdated way of sharing viral events/topics and something related to forwarding content via e-mail.

These sharing options make it really easy to forward content with relatively few steps on both social media platforms, which obviously can be looked at as of great significance of their popularity in the Web 2.0 era we're both witnessing and merging with these days. With these examples it is also possible to exclude the possibility that the decision people make about whether to share or not is hindered by how hard it is to share something, but rather about the social factors. Currently, users can evaluate content by consuming and judging the value of the content. Furthermore, various types of additional information are available as metadata that can be used to classify content. An example of this are ratings by other users. Unfortunately, users have to analyze this information manually.

The word *share* in relation to the Internet and social media is also interestingly two-edged: On one hand, we are encouraged to use as many sharing features as we can. On the other hand, sharing culture have been labeled as a threat by the established media content industries. File sharing from portals such as The Pirate Bay and Isohunt is perhaps the most known type, but media and newspapers experience an increase in content accessing and archiving by Google and other advertising-driven firms, and also by the common individual. Events like these have resulted in content industries working towards a criminalization of sharing and for regulatory models and technological interventions that will inhibit it (Meikle 2016).

So online sharing can indeed be said to operate in different ways, which isn't that strange considering that the origin of the term is in many ways rooted in communication and communion (Williams 1983) with its meaning being diverse in order to achieve connectivity. This again is evident in how the different uses of this word are caught up in attempts to find new media business models for the networked digital environment, signaling both new possibilities and threats. As Meikle also points out, this two-edged dilemma regarding sharing and social media, applies to both users as well as the media industry and social media platform companies. After the introduction of Web 2.0, sharing has become the center of social media platforms, and is perhaps one of the most used ways of the platform owners to convince us to engage with their product and look away from the fact that there's an established business model underneath. Our content is just like a ship on an ocean of information, with sharing as the keel running along the centerline of the ship, from the bow to the stern, mostly unseen from above sea. Surely this way of promoting sharing of content is a form of propaganda devised by the ones who run the business models of these social media platforms, and interestingly enough it is seldom picked up by the public as propaganda in a negative way, but rather how the term was used before the First and Second World Wars.

Sharing as a term in a digital context then has to have some strategic elements regardless of its position has a social, economic, cultural, or political resonance. Over the last decade social media platforms seems to have cultivated and refined the strategic semantic richness of sharing based on their own agendas. But this can also be applied to the users of the social media platforms as well. Therefore, sharing in relation to a digital context and especially social media platforms cannot be employed neutrally as a result of the flexible strategic elements the term itself inhabits. This is mirrored in virality as well, as it is a result of sharing and thus can either address the politics from capitalistic aspect of social media, or the users.

This is also yet a reminder about the importance of a critical approach towards the producer/consumer relationship in social media. The acts of self-expression as something to be shared, is very often underlined by an economical agenda, like giving up our rights to our own photos on Facebook. But this is also relieved by the user's possibilities of a somewhat wide creative freedom and approach, and especially that of their view on sharing and to what extent they choose to submit content online (whether original content or not). There's still a tradeoff between the different platforms and the users, but it is important to keep in mind that almost 98 percent of the 100 biggest social media platforms today, identify the Internet as a

marketplace first, and a public forum second (van Dijck 2013). While the platforms agendas helped with the introduction of sharing culture, the shift from this to a culture based on sharing (Castells 2009) comes with a whole new set of challenges for both parts, and the undermining of "making sociality technical" (van Dijk 2013) can have serious consequences to everyone's daily lives and interaction in the years to come. It is therefore crucial to approach the social media relationship between the producer and consumer and the meanings and functions they are based on, and how this can affect the function of virality and viral art as either marketplace mediators, or forces of resistance.

4.1.3 The public of social media

Sharing is a very important element to understand virality and social media, as it is the sharing of content that enables it to saturate thought the networks at such high speed. Perhaps even more importantly though is the ones that actually share the content. The public, the humans, or people that both share and consume the content represented as a general mass. The human part of social media or the participants has been referred to as users, but what is a user in an online context of social media? What kind of public are the users and consumers of viral events and topics? In his essay *Publics and Counterpublics* Michael Warner discusses the challenges of trying to define such a context related term as "public" is (Warner 2002). One of the problems is related to its heavy usage and strong position in our social lives, and how it is used in many different settings, defining different aspects of it and often being used without an established common agreement of its definition. It is also a term that can be very connected in relation to space and time (Warner 2002).

Two of the most common definitions of the term can be said to be the public as in the sense of the people in general, or as the Oxford dictionary puts it: "Ordinary people in general; the community" (Oxforddictionary 2017). This "social totality" way of definition is perhaps the one that first come in mind. A wholeness that encompass us all within our society, and perhaps often even on a global scale. The other one is the "concrete public", defined by Warner as "a crowd witnessing itself in a visible space, as that of a theatrical public" (Warner 2002, 1). Here we see the public as bounded by an event or physical space, where something gathers an audience and creates a border, separating it from the bigger social totality. This can be seen all the time everywhere around us on different scales. A concert, a soccer match, a class. All of these are examples of a concrete public.

Jürgen Habermas pointed out that "Citizens act as a public when they deal with the matters of general interest without being subject to coercion; thus with the guarantee that they will assemble and unite freely, and express and publicize their opinions freely" (Habermas 1989, 232). This is perhaps another reason for the presence of the public and its importance as a symbol of of a unified free will in a society, and almost from the beginning of the Internet (especially from Web 2.0 and onwards) we have been introduced to tools that have helped us connect with whomever we want and create whatever we want and share it online.
But Warner also introduces a third sense of the word: namely the public in relation to texts and their circulation (Warner 2002). The boundaries between these three kinds can be blurry, but the distinctions between them are worth understanding as the transpositions among them can have important social effects (Warner 2002). This last argument is very relevant in relation to social media and the users, as the online presence in the form of an extension of ourselves into the three-dimensional space of the databases and servers in a way manifest into a new or hybrid form of public.

The Internet or social media public, is as any other public, some sort of receiving audience at the end of something mediated, like a piece of text, video, image or sound, although the term "audience" in relation to to the public is perhaps a bad term (we'll come back to why later). Warner (2002) defines it as "autotelic" and that the public exist only by virtue of being addressed. By conventional means - just like in the real world, content in any form must address to some sort of public in order to be defined as content. This doesn't by any means imply that the numerical-based information that exist in staggering numbers online cannot be addressed as content. It just implies the need for an audience or receiver to pick it up and decipher whatever message it contains.

I would argue that Warner's addition of a third sense of public can be addressed to an online public as well, and if we combine the common link to online presence with the addition or understanding of digital videos and images as the same discourse, or even identical as to text, we are left with a modified version of this third sense, that only exist within an online circulation system perhaps most present today through the different types of social media platforms. There are of course no sharp distinctions between these three types of public, as our online representations very much represent a different version of a social totality on a regular basis, and the live feeds on facebook are good examples of events amassing a

concrete public online, as people navigate towards live streamings and become a part of a fixed audience for a relatively short amount of time.

The term of public as a social totality and concrete public makes our individual roles confusing as well. The public as a people makes sense, perhaps with a mental image of numeral individuals together as a crowd. Yet the public goes beyond this as it is capable of organizing itself as a body and being addressed in discourse (Warner 2002). This also makes it easy to refer to an audience and the public as the same thing, which is perhaps one of the reasons that public as a term has become such an elusive and blurred concept in recent years. In his paper *The public as a social experience*, humanities researcher and philosopher Samuel Mateus, argues the importance of separating audience and public, as the audience is a more individualized approach and reception to media contents, represented as a collective noun (Mateus 2011). This however is not necessarily valid or of importance in this thesis. The reason for this is that the audience in relation to the public weighs more than the public and audience as separated terms when discussing the relations between viral art and social media especially. Here, much of the focus lies on a mixture of public and audience very much like the three kinds of public described by Warner, and most likely as a result of the viral content in relation to the audience and the public.

In this thesis then it is sufficient to address the public in relation to the three different definitions presented by Warner, or rather three definitions that overlap each other somewhat. It is also crucial to understand the difference and relation of the audience as something that can appear in relation to the public and even exist within it, but that the public goes beyond the audience and isn't even dependent on it in order to exist.

4.1.4 Social media platforms of control

Recent years social media have evolved quite a lot from their dawn, but some still carry features in their design and purpose from the early days of non-market orientation mixed with the for-profit principles that have become more and more prominent in the later years. As a result of this, the boundaries between private and public space have become blurred or fuzzy, which can both be looked at as a positive thing as it opens up new possibilities for identity formation (Papacharissi 2010), or a negative evolution that has strayed away from the evolution of Web 2.0 as an instrument for participatory culture, self-regulation and democracy (van Dijk 2013). Perhaps one of the most obvious departures from the earlier

modes of social media, is the commercial introduction of new modes of surveillance as a part of the accumulation of user data in relation to the connectivity aspect of social media culture. There are arguments that the users are being exploited to a degree that simply cannot be justified the way the situation is now (Terranova 2004). All of these conflicting challenges and changes is a result of the relational characters of these technologies and ideologies, that experience a form of piggybacking by the capitalism (Petersen 2008).

One of the most interesting links between Web 2.0 and social media and the for-profit approach by the biggest social media platforms is the huge potential that lies in it in the future as well as the present. As a result of continuously upgraded technology, we see new uses of these powerful tools every day, and the limits can in some ways almost be impossible to imagine. Considering that within less than a decade we've gotten a new infrastructure for our online sociality and creativity that has influenced our culture immensely, who knows what the future holds regarding the web and social media. The almost tremendous influence that these online platforms have on our daily lives, is really evident in our use of the tools of Web 2.0 to organize our lives. With the invention of the World Wide Web starting out as a new type of networked communication (van Dijk 2013), the shift to two-way interactive tools for networked sociality now offers to manage our daily lives on a far wider scale than just chatting with other individuals. In fact, one could say that as the medium co-evolves with us, it contributes to shaping our everyday lives.

As we apply more and more specific objective programming into the social media infrastructure, we are able to assign more and more services to it, but we are also growing dependent on these services and losing some of the ability to tinker with it on the way (van Dijk 2013). In this way social media can also be said to be dynamic objects that are tweaked in response to user needs and their owner's objectives, but also in reaction to other (competing) platforms and the larger technological and economic infrastructure through which they develop (Feenberg 2009). With our daily lives spread out in the lap of social media, there's also the underlying economy and value of the social media platforms that is perhaps overlooked by the user on a day-to-day basis, but is a primary motive for 98 out of the 100 biggest social media platforms today (Van Dijk 2013). Evidently there's an exchange between making the Web more social and interactive, and utilizing connectivity as a resource. Our individual user data comes together with everyone else's user data online,

offering vast quantities of information about our behavioral actions and taste, which again can have a huge economic potential in the hands of the right people.

It is possible to argue that social media are automated systems that engineer and manipulate connections (Vand Dijk 2013). Platforms like Facebook are working hard to track our desires via algorithms designed to code relationships like ideas, things and people between individuals. As a result of this, we are left with a technical sociality, that based on detailed and intimate knowledge of people's desires and likes, are able to develop and steer our desires. These are important factors that will shape the next generation of social media platforms, as the developer's goals are perhaps in many ways getting heavily saturated with an overhanging commercializing cloud. More importantly though, the already established ongoing harvest of our user data with the evolution of a technical society, where more and more of everyday activities can be appointed to the machines, bear witness about a transfer from the disciplinary society and into a society of control.

Whether or not the future of social media platforms will be more or less nuanced than it is now, and whether we continue allowing them to create tools that steer us in the direction of desires based on collected data, the desires themselves will still be there. Looking back to the last decade, we've seen many social media platforms come and go in attempts to score a piece of the online terrain and build an empire based on a particular domain (e.g., image sharing or social networking), and then gradually expanding into new territory in battles with other social media platforms. Today, the current winners of this ongoing battle can be said to be Google and Facebook as they have each conquered big chunks of the online terrain. The other platforms out there, together with the ones being developed for the future are actually now depending on Google and Facebook's aid to be able to survive and prosper (vand Dijk 2013). This trend is perhaps a hint towards the future and what it holds in relation to the social media platforms. Until now, we've been presented with many different niche platforms, but some studies point towards a future where all services can be accessible from only one or two platforms (Mozur 2016).

Hints about this evolution in online sociality services can be found in the Asian part of the world. In january 2011, Tencent, a Chinese tech firm released their social media app called "WeChat" that has caught the attention of Western companies. The reason for this is that WeChat can offer a whole lot more than what its name implies, such as paying bills, hail a

taxi, book a doctor's appointment, share photos, videos and chat. In contrast to most social media apps nowadays that try to find its niche within the terrain of social media, WeChat is a successful attempt on taking an even bigger chunk of the cake than Google and Facebook have done up until now.

Within the WeChat app you are able to do so many different things other than just chat and stay in touch with people. The combination of e-commerce and real-world services all within the same app can turn out to be a real game changer in many different ways (Mozur 2016). One of the biggest challenges that WeChat has to overcome in order to be successful outside of China, is to function in a less restricted Internet. Due to the different Internet infrastructure in China compared to the Western World, WeChat can only offer its services inside China and is reduced to a chat and photo sharing app in the rest of the world (Mozur 2016). Aside from this though, it is a good example of what may lie ahead for the rest of the world in the near future, as China has proven to popularize technology (like Snapchat's bar code system, also known as QR codes, to connect and share with people) that have later found its way into the Western market (Mozur 2016). There are other options for a system where an app like WeChat can be fully functional, but these options may change our online experience to such a degree, that the future Internet for people living in the Western part of the world can very well end up to become a more restricted experience.

Further clues about this possible evolution of the Internet is found in the net neutrality discussion, where the right to communicate freely is being challenged by new legislations (Free Press 2017). If the network neutrality disappears, we could potentially face a version of the Internet where companies like AT&T, Comcast and Verizon suddenly are able to decide who is heard and who isn't, slowing down or blocking any content, applications or websites they want (Free Press 2017). The effects of this is that the user loses even more freedom and control of the Internet experience. This "narrowing down" of the Internet into less intricate and free lanes of experience could in a worst case scenario mark a complete transition from the disciplinary society and into a complete society of control in a "Deleuzian" way (Deleuze 1992). Without net neutrality, many of the tools for fighting against oppression will no longer be available. On March 23, 2017, the US Senate voted 50-48 in favor of a resolution that would repeal a set of internet privacy rules that would have required ISPs like Comcast, Cox Communications, or CenturyLink to ask for user' consent before selling those users' browsing data to advertisers. This is related to other recent events where the definition of what the

internet is in the eyes of the American government, changed. In 2015 the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) voted on net neutrality rules to reclassify internet service providers as “common carriers”, which basically means that ISPs are subject to the same rules as other utilities. This allowed the FCC to enforce net neutrality laws, which force all ISPs to provide access to all kinds of content on the internet equally (Morrison 2015). But the new resolution that the Senate voted in favor of on Thursday would effectively roll back many of these changes, allowing ISPs to do whatever they want with their users' browsing data (Selyukh 2017). The fight for net neutrality continues into the future, as President Trump and the Trump administration continues pushing forward towards rethinking net neutrality regulations, something that many fears will be the end of the open Internet as we know it (Nichols 2017).

In some ways, having a single operating system for your daily life seems to be a logical next step in the evolution of the social media. It’s less messy as a result of an effort focused on turning chat into an operating system where interactions like ordering food and getting a cab is done through an app like WeChat or similar. The question regarding how much we are willing to give up in order to achieve this is something else though, as the progression towards a single operating system for online activities could mean a more complete society of control.

It is hard to find out exactly when virality emerged online, but it is safe to say that the introduction of Web 2.0 and the tools that shaped today’s social media climate, is what made it possible for it to become a very present part of the information flow on the Internet today. Before this, the Internet was a very different landscape, with a more primitive infrastructure based around passive consumerism and the absence of automation systems that keep us connected today. The framework was there, but the nodes still needed more connections, and the lacking of appropriate tools to expand the user experience was still being developed. In this climate, virality as we know it today did not thrive, as the network structure consisted of smaller clusters with few bridging weak ties. This doesn’t mean that virality did not exist, as one of the best examples of virality was found in the email systems, where people shared various content between each other. The tools introduced by the Web 2.0 revolution gave birth to the social media platforms (among many other things), where virality quickly became more present and visible via the growing sharing culture. As the intricate information network that makes up the Internet become increasingly complex and sophisticated, the

individual aspect of an audience blurs out, until we are left with a more or less global public, organizing itself as a discursive body with the help of the Web 2.0 tools all the while being under guidance of underlying economical agendas devised by the platforms.

4.2 Viral and virality: events and topics, content and views

As previously mentioned, sorting out and evaluating the useful elements in the sea of information related to the sharing culture, is something that everyone relates to on a daily basis through the use of social media. Viral as a term, has several definitions but was primarily used in relation to biological diseases, like viruses, before it was adopted and used in relation to digital culture, sharing culture, social media and marketing strategies (Wilde, 2014). But even though a somewhat typical example of time changing the use of a word, this transition from the biological realm and into the digital did not strip the entire meaning of the viral and virality, as both viruses and information have in common that they need carriers and possess the ability to mutate while spreading (Wu, Huberman, Adamic et al. 2004).

We see then, that one of the key elements of virality is the spreading of something adaptable. Something that is almost always related to the phenomena of sharing and publishing of content via social media platforms. Namely virality as a part of the information flow in social media and as a part of both the technological and the social networks that enables sharing. One of the perhaps most common ways to approach the virality as a term, is in relation to marketing strategies and how Nic Howell simply defines it as “getting audiences to pass on your message” (Howell 2010). This however is a way too easy and general definition as the viral term itself is essential to this thesis and needs a proper deep understanding and outlining, especially if we approach viral art more as an effect rather than straightforward objects. As with everything one desires to achieve an in depth understanding for, viral and virality is far more complex to be described in a single sentence about people forwarding a message. It is also important to differentiate between a viral event, and a viral topic. When we talk about virality as events, the focus lies on mostly single events, like a video, photo, tweet, video game and so on. Viral topic(s) on the other hand, consist of multiple events (often both viral and non-viral) that interact, share and build on each other and by this expanding on a bigger topic or movement. A relatively recent example of a viral topic was the #NotOkay movement related to Donald Trump and the 2016 presidential campaign (figure 6).

Following the leaked tape of Donald Trump boasting about groaping women, Kelly Oxford - a writer from Canada - urged women to tweet the #NotOkay hashtag about their first experience with sexual assault (BBC 2016). The result was overwhelming and Oxford's tweet resulted in over a million responds by women all over the world who shared their own stories of sexual assaults. The media quickly caught up, providing even more coverage and was described as not only a political reaction, but a collective unburdening as well (Domonoske 2016).

Figure 6: "Oxford's now famous tweet that initiated the #NotOkay movement"

The #NotOkay movement shows us how a reaction to a media covered event (the leaked tape of Trump) spawned a staggering amount of similar events or responds, resulting in what can only be described as a global social media movement where the topic was shedding light on women suffering from sexual assaults and sharing their stories. This example also shows us how a viral topic can consist of several viral events. In this case the personal stories about sexual assault from the women functioned both as individual events that got retweeted and spawned new responds under the same hashtag.

In their book *Going Viral* (2013), authors Karine Nahon and Jeff Hemsley venture deep into the viral term, presenting different definitions and elements that need to be present in order for a viral topic or event to take place. They define virality as: "a social information flow process where many people simultaneously forward a specific information item, over a short period of time, within their social networks, and where the message spreads beyond their own (social) networks to different, often distant networks, resulting in a sharp acceleration in the number of people who are exposed to the message" (Nahon and Hemsley 2013, 2).

Further on, this definition lists four components that according to Nahon and Hemsley are crucial in the emerging of a viral event or topic and to differentiate virality from other types of informational flow (Nahon and Hemsley 2013):

1. The human and social aspects of sharing information from one to another.
2. The speed of viral spread.
3. The reach in terms of number of people exposed to the content.
4. The reach in terms of the distance the information travels by bridging multiple networks.

All of these four components covers its own aspect of a viral event or topic, and they also share the traits of the original biological definition of virality with exception of switching "virus" with "information". They also emphasize how speed and reach play important roles when it comes to differentiating between i.eg. a video that has gained a lot of views over time and a video that has been picked up and shared by a larger group of people over a relatively short amount of time.

In other words, the time it takes for something to reach out to a lot of people on the Internet is important for something to be coined viral (Nahon and Hemsley 2013). This is where virality on the Internet differs from real life, and where the social media shows its power as a multiplying mediating machine of new media. This can be attributed to a highly linked social infrastructure in combination of someone sharing something on Facebook, Twitter or similar platforms, that creates a ripple of sharing, multiplying like waves of water, resulting in many people simultaneously broadcasting content into their social clusters and networks.

According to Nahon and Hemsley the way virality leverages these sharing situations by each round of new broadcasters sharing the same content as the original poster within their own broadcasting network, explains how content is able to spread out to a large number of individuals in a very short time period (Nahon and Hemsley 2013).
Before the internet and social media, the broadcasting norm was either from one-to-many, where television and radio reigned supreme for many years, and one-to-one like word of mouth. It is not surprising then, that these older forms of communication were somewhat slower, but still had the potential for reaching a large number of people.

We see then that speed is essential for a viral event or topic to emerge, but it also plays a huge part when they peak and start to slow down, which also happens fast (Nahon and Hemsley 2013). In fact, the life cycle of a viral event/topic is short, especially if you start the timer from the first share or retweet, to the point where the number of shares stop increasing. According to research done on Twitter and the retweeting option, half of the retweeting happens within the first hour of the original tweet, and 75 percent within the first day (Kwak 2010). The trend is somewhat similar on Facebook and resharing with a median time of six hours (Bakshy et al. 2012). In general, it seems that the majority of resharing happens within the first day, but that there is some difference depending on the platform as well (Nahon and Hemsley 2013).

Looking at Youtube as a part of the sharing platforms we see some different and interesting results, where the view rate for videos depends on whether the video is linked to promotional forces or more socially driven forces (Crane and Sornette 2008). The number of views for videos on Youtube have a different decline in views depending on the type of video. Trailers (which are promoted before and during their release) quickly spike and decline more sharply as opposed to a video shared via person to person (Crane and Sornette 2008). In most cases though, we are not presented to strictly promotional or socially driven content but rather different variations or combinations of them both (Nahon and Hemsley 2013).

4.2.1 Many views equals viral, no?

So just how important are the views, re shares, retweets etc. etc. when deciding if something is viral or not? Well it depends, actually. The degree of exposure is relative to the event or topic emerging. This enables even the smaller "explosions of exposure" to be considered a viral event/topic. One of the main differences is to look for a peak in the popularity of the object at interest. If we compare two videos, one going viral and one that is not, and comparing the view rate on each of them, then the video that is not going viral would have a more slow and steady view rate, as opposed to a viral video where the will be a slow start, a fast peak and then another fast decline or rate of decay (Nahon and Hemsley 2012).

Perhaps an even more important aspect is how much reach something needs in order to be considered viral in addition to the topical interest. If the viral topic or event is of a niche interest, let's say glitch art or a group designated to unedited smartphone aesthetic pics, then

the reach can also be limited by the popularity of the subject, thus requiring significantly less reach (in terms of numbers) than a new music video of a popstar. This however does not mean that viral niche art cannot go viral beyond its own niche of course, but rather suggest that it is dependent on the right combination of incoherent/coherent aesthetics and politics relative to the audience it is trying to address.

4.2.2 Viral content

At first glance viral content is the different types of content, like text, images and video or a blend of this that inhabits some form of x-factor defined by the public as sensational enough to be recognized above most of the rest of similar content. Nahon and Hensley have a similar definition of this that goes: "Viral content is what stands out as remarkable in a sea of content" (Nahon, Hemsley 2013, 2). In other words, the content itself can be almost anything, but it must stand out enough to get the attention of a broader audience.

Another interesting term related to content is so-called "spreadable media". First coined by academic Henry Jenkins back in 2009 and later being the main subject of his book *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* in 2013. According to Jenkins, spreadable media is based around the distinction between distribution and circulation. In a distribution system, content is spread top-down which is different from a circulation that works more like a hybrid system, spreading content as a result of a series of informal transactions between commercial and non-commercial participants (Jenkins 2013). Jenkins one-sentence definition is that "Spreadable media is media which travels across media platforms at least in part because the people take it in their own hands and share it with their social networks." (Jenkins 2010)

Jenkins is however careful about merging the spreadable media term with virality. The reason for this he claims is that whenever we talk about viral media we have a tendency to mystify the process of it (Jenkins 2010). Jenkins is under the impression that many talk about things going viral when they have no way to explain how or why the content suddenly has reached the public spotlight (Jenkins 2010). Jenkins has a point, and this problem is very similar to how Galloway points out the importance of understanding interfaces as more than just the screens we direct our attention towards, and acknowledge the intricate and often unseen mechanics behind. Viral content can easily become a too broad term, and can even work as a distraction away from any underlying politics that need to be addressed.

4.3 Art, viral art and other genres

"Historically
the techniques of sculpture have reflected the
technological level and character of the society in which the
sculptor lived and worked. In the beginning he carved bone,
wood or stone, or he modeled and fired clay.
Later he developed the elaborate procedures of bronze casting — possibly the
most advanced technology of ancient times.
Today sculptors are increasingly turning to new materials and processes
to provide them with a more contemporary technological base.
They are using plastics, light arrays, strobe units, projectors,
transducers and much else in creating their work.
And they are beginning to use computers as well."

- Robert Mallary in *Computer Scultpure* (1969).

As a renowned sculpture artist and a computer arts pioneer, Robert Mallary tried to analyze the benefits of the computer as a tool for creating art, and especially "high speed visual thinking" in art making. He listed a provisional six-staged levels of development of cybernetic sculpture, based on the computer's function divided into two categories: as a means of calculation and as an optimum creative interface able to perform the sculpting in harmony with a human programmer (Mallary 1969). At stage one of six, the computer is just a performer of mathematical, calculating chores, that can also be done by a mathematician or simply another human being, enabling the artist to focus on other aspects of the creation and leaving the most tedious chores to the computer (Mallary 1969).

Stage six signals the stage where the human artist himself have become redundant, as the computer is now able to organize and perform every step of the creation, and will have a life of its own being able to think and sustain itself (Mallary 1969). At this point in history it seems that we don't have to worry about the implications of Mallary's stages six for a while, as we've reached stage 2 and made the computer an indispensable working tool but have only recently begun to use algorithms to store information about our behavior and suggest (simple)

solutions to our actions based on stored data (stage 3). But Mallary's analysis of the computer in relation to art shows the fresh field of computer technology and the interest in the potential of it that was established in the sixties. It also shows the evolution of how artists have used the computer in relation to art, from the 60's where it was used by researchers as a means of researching their visual ideas, to the evolution of "independent" programming and more and more powerful microchips in the 70's and 80's making it possible to experiment and create more with lesser limitations (Lovejoy 2004). Today's powerful computers can now offer an outstanding array of creational tools compared to only a decade ago, which again raises yet another important question: What is art in relation to digital technologies?

This is a very fundamental question that has to be revisited from time to time as a result of the evolving nature of digital technologies, and something that could easily be the theme of a masters or PHD, and thus cannot be represented in a substantial way here. It is however interesting and important to note the challenges of trying to define and relate something as all-encompassing as art in relation to digital technologies, is (Drucker 2013). Everything can be considered art, depending on the circumstances and time period, and especially modern history is full of obscure, absurd and surreal examples of this. Perhaps the most well-known piece of artwork related to this is Duchamp's "Fountain", the porcelain urinal that has been named the most influential modern art work of all time, beating famous artists like Picasso and Matisse on the list (BBC 2004), proves the very importance and challenges faced when defining art. The piece also tells us that today's art is not all about the artwork itself, but rather "reflects the dynamic nature of art today and the idea that the creative process that goes into a work of art is the most important thing. The work itself can be made of anything and can take any form." (BBC 2004). But what about contemporary art and its role in the ethics, or rather as an ethic?

With the rise of the computer as a powerful multi-tool for anything from paying taxes, to editing video and images, in relation to art we also see it as a challenger to the conventional notions of visual representation, aesthetics and ethics. The new way of representation made through logical, numeric-based mathematical language structured models, have introduced us to a brand new approach of copying-or rather-simulating the real world as we perceive it through our eyes (Lovejoy 2004). Images and video that we consume online through social media (and every other digital medium imaginable) are composed of pixels that are designated through their numerical value and not their shape or volume as they would be

were it not digital but analog objects. The original scene of digital art then is that of the numerical world with a potential of manipulation far bigger than any analog artwork. This potential has both positive and negative consequences for the reputation of image and video-based information, and popular formats like photographies once recognized as epitomes of truth (Lovejoy 2004), challenges our quest towards originality and authenticity. In this sense, art in relation to digital technologies have come to challenge our views regarding authentic sources of information and content, making us aware about the potential that anything can be fake, one key example of this is the increasing numbers of so-called “fake news” online. As Galloway points out, the simulation has replaced ideology, where ideology understood as “imaginary relationships to real conditions”, has now been altered to "imaginary relationship to ideological conditions."(Galloway 2012, 52). He further argues that ideology modeled in software, or rather the computer as the ultimate ethical machine, is a perfection of the ideological regime and thus brings the death of the ideological regime.

So we’ve come to the point in history where the digital realm is starting to show of its true power as a creative tool for making new kinds of artwork and genres, but also powerful contributions that is able to address the relationship between aesthetics and politics. This is evident in the experimentation with digital technology and art that have been present since the very beginning of the digital regime, and there are many examples of interesting and groundbreaking artworks emerging from digital technology through the years. We see that digital technologies offer a lot of different ways to experiment with and create art, ranging from the more common playgrounds like computer games, codeart, and video/photo manipulation, to more recent experimentation with image, video and music created by artificial neural networks (ANS). Web 2.0 and social media play a huge part in this and reflects Andy Warhol’s famous statement that “In the future everybody will be world famous for fifteen minutes,” quote that in later years has spawned several different versions, replacing fifteen minutes with fifteen seconds or even “to fifteen people” (Hicks 2015).

These changes in representation have a lot of interesting qualities. Thanks to modern technical developments, art made within the digital realm exist in a reality that can be said to reside within our reality. In other words, we now have a parallel reality as a result of the mechanical reproduction or simulation of reality that computers perform whenever e.g. a photo or a video is shown on a screen (Lovejoy 2004). This also goes for any visual based

digital art as a result of the electronic production of the product displayed being immaterial and existing only as a structure or a data set without any physical substance (Lovejoy 2004). When Lev Manovich in his *The Language of New Media* (Manovich 2001) wrote about the database as the center of the creative process in the computer age, he points at the evolution of new media works and their appropriation of their new medium-the computer and the convergence and limitless possibilities of creativity that resemble the computer's own structure in the way that databases exist in a three dimensional space that they operate within. This is perhaps also what defines digital artworks when it comes to their potential to move in a three dimensional parallel reality, that was never possible in the analog world of yesterday, while simultaneously being the reason why digital art genres is a perhaps even bigger challenge when examining the relational characters of the technologies with the aesthetics and politics.

The way that art is evolving continuously alongside us humans, adapting new delivery technologies and discarding the ones that fail to keep up with the newer technologies, also tells us that we are not about to go separate ways with art. Frankly it tells us that it's here to stay for as long as we humans stay connected to each other in one way or another. As Henry Jenkins puts it: "Once a medium establishes itself as satisfying some core human demand, it continues to function within the larger system of communication options" (Jenkins 2008, 14). If we define art in the form of media or rather art as a medium, then the transcendence of art and the digital seem only logical and natural.

With this new (how long should we actually cling to this notion of recent-ness?) digital realm, we are in many ways forced to look at the convergence zone of new media and art. According to Jenkins (2008), convergence and especially media convergence refers to the fallacy of a range of media merged into one (what he calls the big box fallacy). Jenkins argues that media will always exist everywhere but never in only one form (Jenkins 2008). This is also related to the emerging of a new generation of digital artists, not originating from other fields, but born and molded within the realms of the tools that modern technology and the framework of web 2.0 can offer. Following the timeline of the electronic literature and Katherine Hayles marking of a rupture in the field, dividing a break between first-generation and second-generation works somewhere around 1995 (Hayles 2008), it is possible to point out a difference in how the works before and after the break are focused more on written textuality (before) and more and more adaptation and appropriation of the continued

technological progress with the inclusion of more audio and visual elements in their works (after).

Considering the nature of this thesis and the different genres where it's possible to find art or art related content with viral qualities, the definition of art itself must be flexible. Flexible but still solid enough to converge these categories, and enable discussions around them. As a result of the evolution of art and the diversity of contemporary art, we see that such a definition is not uncommon, and that the idea of reflecting dynamics within the nature of art itself together with the creative process is perhaps more important than the artworks. This is especially apparent in the most concrete main example of viral artistry in this thesis, namely the viral art belonging to Zardulu, where the work itself is made out various components all made possible by the social networks, and takes on different forms depending on the background knowledge of the beholder. When discussing art within this thesis, it is to be understood as art that is either digitally born or designated to end up in the realm of the World Wide Web in form of digital online content.

4.3.1 Viral art

While still a fairly new term, viral art is applied in some articles and books, although the definitions differ quite a lot. One of the recent more interesting and in-depth definitions, comes from R.J Rushmore, artist. blogger and author of *Viral art* (2013). In this book, R. J Rushmore focus on the relation between street art/graffiti and the digital and online artworld. He argues about the importance of the Internet for the evolution and popularity of street art, using examples of artist that (to different degrees) embrace the Internet as a place for street art. Rushmore's definition of viral art is at its core: "the unmediated (digital) distribution of art from artist to public" (Rushmore 2013, 315). In other words, this definition of viral art is focused on removing the parameters that stand between the artwork and the public in the same way that (physical) street art does when it's installed in the city landscape. Rushmore argues that the new public space for unmediated distribution is online and that street artists and graffiti writers should strive to hack these new systems in the same way that they hacked stencils, spray paint, wheatpaste and stickers that were not originally designed to be used for street art or graffiti (Rushmore 2013). Viral art then, becomes a digital equivalent to street art and graffiti.

Further on he divides viral art into two groups: Organic viral art and invasive viral art. Organic viral art is the most common type of viral art and probably a very close definition to what most people would guess if asked about what viral art is. It is distributed by people choosing to share it, such as an artist posting a photo on Facebook that gets picked up by the fan base and reshared on various social media networks (Rushmore 2013). Invasive viral art is according to Rushmore art that takes full advantage of the Internet's potential for unmediated distribution of art from artist to public, that doesn't have to happen as a result of the natural sharing streams online that organic viral art travels through. It is art that typically invades the public space of the Internet and appears places where it "doesn't belong" (Rushmore 2013). In many ways, this definition of viral art is interesting and lay out the main features of viral art. I would however argue that it does have its flaws. The invasive viral art group is very poorly linked to virality. Most of the examples of invasive viral artworks Rushmore uses either lack carriers, distribution or circulation, which isn't that strange considering that these are qualities related to virality as a biological and social media term and organic virality itself, but is not easily compatible with something that is supposed to invade the public space without using the natural online sharing streams.

The way invasive viral art is presented as it is, it lacks too much in spreadable power to be something purely viral (it doesn't really go well with Jenkins spreadable media term either). Rushmore acknowledges this to a certain degree and even states that only some invasive viral art can be shared and that the reason it has viral in it is because of its close relation with organic viral art (Rushmore 2013). But this relation also applies for many of the other terms of art online, meaning that invasive viral art could just as well be called invasive digital art, net art or any similar genre, that all have the potential of virality within them. Invasive art as a term is very interesting though and its invasive qualities can prove to be a great advantage when addressing politics as an opposing force within a society of control. This is however only provided that it is able to have some form of spreadable power, perhaps by using the gatekeepers of the internet to disperse it. Invasive art is a thrilling concept and while it really isn't very present in today's online landscape, we might very well see a lot more of it in the future.

Another potential problem with these definitions is that Rushmore doesn't really provide a clear definition of distribution in relation to viral art as opposed to distribution of any content that appears online. Virality and viral art are both depending on a somewhat concise outline

of what makes it viral. Mediated or unmediated distribution in itself is not enough for something to be viral because then it would include any shareable content online. It works in a setting where we are applying the definition when we talk about content that has the potential of going viral. Also Rushmore apparently does not include anything related to the fact that virality is also a relative and not fixed term and can appear on different scales relative to the size of its public. It is important to note that Rushmore's initial approach to viral art is in relation to street art and graffiti, which can help explain his focus on the mediated and unmediated distribution before and after the introduction of Internet tools. Before the Internet, street art was very limited in distribution other than catching the attention of the audience of its designated place, and virality as a term in relation to this was more geographically oriented than now, where geographic location is mostly irrelevant to the spreading of street art online. Furthermore, as with most art in general, the Internet has contributed greatly to the expansion and availability, as both more familiar street art and street art that have adopted new tools, can be found as viral content on social media platforms.

Returning to the definition of viral art, we find another interesting and slightly more commonly associated definition of viral art formulated by American artist Parker Ito. Ito's way of looking at viral art is: "when you reach really far beyond your initial social networking sphere and the end location is somewhere you usually never expected or planned for the work to end up" (Chayka, 2012). This is a fairly straightforward definition, easily applicable to artworks of any genre. But this definition does have a minor flaw, in that it doesn't really account for the viral artworks intended to reach the front page of the internet, or as many people as possible. These types of artworks are becoming a big part of viral art, which makes sense. For artists striving to be seen, to focus on making artworks with trending capabilities can be one of the golden tickets to making a career and living off their own work. By creating art that goes viral, they can gain a big fan base very fast, and become an established artist almost overnight. This especially applies to viral art that has its origin in pop culture or current trending events and topics. For the main bulk of artists, the goal can be said to be exposure and distribution of their artworks through various systems within our culture. This applies to both analog and digital art and, from paintings in a gallery, illegal street art on a wall in the city landscape, to gif art on a Tumblr page and a music video on Youtube (and the list can go on forever). Even if the intention behind viral content is

precisely to achieve virality, fame and exposure in shallow way, that doesn't change the fact that it's out there and that it went viral.

To include this part of viral art it is important that the definition highlights the fact that the seemingly unexpected end location for viral content from the audience point of view, can be different from the artist/creator behind the original content and his/her vision. By acknowledging this part of viral art and the artists we are able to construct a more solid definition that works both in a general setting and in relation to the discussion in chapter 5 of this thesis. As we try to answer what viral art is we need to keep in mind the political aspect of virality and viral art as well, or at least define something that also address the layers of new media that is present within viral art. This also makes sense if we take a couple of steps back and see virality and viral art more as effects or instances happening within a system or a network. A definition of viral art within the context of the thesis must go somewhere along these lines: *Viral art is perceived as art that is either digitally born or designated to end up in the realm of the World Wide Web in some form of digital online content, with a destination and reach beyond the expected initial social networking sphere and to an (often) unexpected end location.* Examples of initial social networking spheres can be the individuals that together form one's Facebook friend list, a group, subforum and any other group of people that have something in common.

This definition of viral art is good, in that it includes the many lesser-known sub genres of artwork that normally don't get exposed to huge crowds. Also it eliminates the less interesting and dominating aspect of viral content mentioned by Jenkins under "spreadable media". It is also possible to address different types of artworks with ease, which comes handy in relation to the examples of viral art in this thesis. The conversion of analog content into digital art is something that is worth addressing. As it is becoming clearer and clearer that virality and viral art are results of relations between Internet-related technologies and social interaction viral art itself doesn't necessarily have to something digital by nature, but rather popular content circulating a network. In this way, viral art can also be analog art that has been given new life in a digital environment and going viral because of this. In fact, as we will see in chapter 5, excluding any format, digital, analog or conceptual, would prove counteractive to the type of viral art Zardulu creates. Some of the most impressive and interesting examples of viral art are actually found here, as the implementation of new

technology together with familiar analog formats showcase some of the new approaches to creating contemporary art.

For the sake of the heavy focus on the digital and later conceptual viral art taking up a lot of the spotlight, some examples should be highlighted as well. A good case of analog art going viral online is the art of Patrick Hughes, a painter that rose to fame in the sixties. His paintings, which are based on a method he calls "reverspective" – where the things that appear farthest away are actually closest in the image – became a viral event when a tourist used his camera phone to record one of Hughes's paintings in the Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery. The clip that ended up on Youtube, homes in on of Hughes's 3D paintings resembling the walls of an art gallery, and when the camera moves, the perspective of the gallery changes, stretching the depth of the room until finally we are left with a distorted image of the art gallery, as the shape of the painting is revealed to be made out of three trapezoidal forms pointing outwards from the wall and the frame of the painting (Davis 2015).

Hughes's paintings are interesting because they are different from more ordinary analog paintings in that they benefit from camera and video technology today in order to be perceived in the right way. A simple picture copy of the work is not enough to make it come to life, as the paintings and Hughes's "reverspective" method requires movement similar to real life body, head and eye movement. The camera technology on almost any mobile phone today is able to mediate this, by rendering and uploading it to platforms like Facebook and Youtube. Paintings like these, that in earlier days would require a gallery and live audience in order to work their magic, are now benefitting immensely from the technological innovation combo of accessible camera technology and the Internet.

Also it's interesting to note the fact that Hughes, the artist himself, had no hand in the creation of his own artworks as a viral event (Hudson 2016). His paintings also plays on a big wow factor, namely that of the optical illusion, something that has drawn people in for thousands of years. This is also most likely the reason behind the viral events based on his analog paintings. Another example of viral art that play on our perceptual capabilities is the nano sculptures made by Jonty Hurwitz. By placing his sculptures on various objects, like a human hair or in the eye of a needle, Hurwitz is able to demonstrate just how small they really are.

“The challenge is that these works exist beyond the limits of our perceptual capabilities, and as a consequence beyond the realms of what we can visualize,” Hurwitz said. “The thickness of a single hair is something that every person has pondered at some point in their childhood.” (Weingus 2014).

Another example of creating artwork based on the merging of something physical with the digital, creating a single cohesive work, is one made by the artist known as Bumblebeelovesyou. The final work called “The Story of How Things Came to Bee” (figure 7) is based on diorama-like installations inside newspaper bins around Los Angeles (Bumblebeelovesyou 2009). These installations can more or less stand on their own as a small sculptures, but when they are put together in Bumblebeelovesyou’s Flickr account, they transform into something bigger. By using Flickr’s note feature, the artist was able to add text boxes that pop up when hovering over the destined part of one of the photos. Suddenly, a set of diorama-like sculptures installed in the physical world becomes a very different photo-based web comic that can only be fully experienced online.

Figure 7: “A Story Of How Things Came To Bee”.

4.3.2 Digital art and virality: a melting pot of genres

So we know that Internet and viral art can manifest itself online in a variety of different ways, from pure image or video based art with limited to no ways of interaction, to pieces that rely on stand-alone software like apps, enabling more custom ways to get submerged into the

content. The social media platforms, especially the SNS's and UGC's contribute to the sharing and creation of creative content through the different platforms built-in tools for content making and publishing, or simply via link sharing. Some of these platforms contribute more than others, and both types of platforms and different genres of art occupy different niches online. As a result of this, some genres of art are more susceptible to virality than others or fit into better into the template of one type of social media platform over the other(s). Below you will find the genres and platforms that make up the bulk of online art in relation to social media.

One of the first genres of online art that springs to mind, is digital art. For most people it's a very widespread and confusing term that seemingly covers art that is digital. Digital art as a term and a category in this thesis however, is a bit more nuanced and revolves around the growing market of digital artworks and the commercialization of these. Within the recent decade, pages like Sedition, an online platform where artists distribute art in digital format, have appeared and seemingly adapted the digital art market. This way of distribution works in the way that the artworks are presented as digital limited editions accessible via browsers or dedicated apps on smartphones, tablets computers or TVs. The artworks are high-resolution stills or videos that can be purchased by members who are logged in, and are stored in a digital storage called the "Vault" (Sedition 2016). The stall of artist distributing their artworks through Sedition is expanding, and consist of fairly new and upcoming people, as well as renowned contemporary artists such as Damien Hirst and Yoko Ono.

Sedition is an interesting platform, as it seems to be one of the forerunners of the distribution of digital art online. Their Facebook page alone has over 500 000 likes with regular updates both on this page and their website, and the amount of artwork they offer is very varied, from simple videos of rotating objects (like a crystal skull), to complex animations with sound effects. Their focus on distributing these artworks in different limited editions also hint that they are working on raising the awareness and demand for digital art.

I would argue that digital art like the ones that are distributed via platforms and companies like Sedition are the ones least likely to go viral. The reason for this simply lies in their exclusivity. As they are digital limited editions of artworks, they are harder (but by no means impossible) to copy and distribute to a larger audience. The point with these artworks is that they are digitally crafted and share many of the characteristics of new media, with the

exception of bypassing the ability to be copied in countless clones. Digital art in this format is in many ways the type that resembles the analog high society world of art that we associate with art galleries and exhibitions the most. Their ownership is claimed by distinct individuals that very often have to pay a substantial amount of money to acquire it, and are not meant to be distributed via larger intricate networks in the same way that most viral art does. The chances for this type of digital art to be shared and saturated sufficiently within the different network clusters and become viral, are therefore very limited.

Another term related to digital art, but perhaps most used in the earlier days of the web, is Internet art or net-art. Net-art can simply be defined as art that is made to be online and to be experienced from a computer screen, and not art that has been digitized and uploaded online to be seen online (Bookchin and Shulgin 1999). Net art then appears in its "true" form and setting online, far away from museums and galleries and works as a collective term for many different types of artworks. Early examples of net art seems to be (mostly) focused on less of the aesthetic appeal of the internet and more on what kind of potential it can have (Kerr 2015). This is evident in "_readme" (1998) by Heath Bunting, an experiment with hyperlinks in a piece based on a press clipping about Bunting reformatted so that many of the words are hyperlinks to other websites. Dutch artist Joan Heemskerk and the Belgian Dirk Paesmans "jodi.org" (1995) artworks and Serbian Vuk Cosics "Deep ASCII" (1998) are both examples of the exploration and experimentation with coding and markup language to make artworks either hidden within a website's page source or made entirely out of binary numbers. Yael Kanarek's "World of Awe" (1995) an ongoing fictional online diary that mixes love letters to cyborgs with 3D models and landscapes is another vastly different artwork, presented as a rather simple desktop interface with single entries or journals represented as own files (Kerr 2015).

More recent examples of net art are Rafaël Rozendaal's free browser app or Chrome extension named "Abstract Browsing", that converts any websites original content into contrasting colored boxes that change colors every few seconds (Rozendaal 2014). Joe Hamilton's artwork "Indirect Flights" (2015) is an interactive website that provides different and fragmented aerial views of the world that are collaged into a dense panorama resulting in interesting and dizzying perspectives. Loren Schmidt and Katie Rose Pipkin created the "@mothgenerator" in 2015, a twitter bot that posts imaginary moths of all shapes, sizes, and colors, and each arrives with a generated name derived from thousands of English and Latin

moth names (Oconnell 2015). Computer generated art is represented more and more. Kate Hollenback's "Simple Business Machines" (2015), a visual reconfiguration of buttons, knobs and sliders of a control board and Neil Mendoza's ""The Selfie-Selfie-O-Matic" arrange elements consisting of dolls, flower patterns and frames different every time (Voon 2015).

A couple of decades after the first net art pieces we see that some of the experimentations with the early technology have died out as a result of different branches of technology being added and others removed. Some artworks still stand out as very experimental in areas where newer net art have yet to reach or expand further on. It's not even likely that this will occur, as the post-Web 2.0 Internet and tools are centered around a much more visual and aesthetically dimension than the days of early net art. With the addition of new tools, we also see that it can restrict our creative freedom or at least in some way narrow down and streamline our focus to match that of the current web culture. That is not to say that we have reached a limit in our creative output online, as there will always be some individuals that find ways around the new borders, always pushing the limits forward, but the angle of approach will always be affected by the current state of our world and society.

Moving on to a genre that also can fit under the way too generalized digital art-moniker, is electronic literature. The field of e-lit is a vast one, with multiple genres of different works generally considered to be "digital born"- created on a computer and meant to be read on a computer (Hayles 2008), and has more than earned the rights to it's own genre of digital art. Following the Electronic Literature Organization and their definition of e-lit as: "Work with an important literary aspect that takes advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by the stand-alone or networked computer." (Hayles 2008), we are presented a broad definition with different genres displayed in the Electronic Literature Collection.
The collection now comprising of three volumes (2016) with works ranging from more basic hypertext fiction with emphasis on text, to more recent additions taking full use of the multimodal capabilities of the web. This includes wide varieties of navigation, use of sound and game elements similar to video games.

As stated by Hayles (2008), the major genres of e-lit offers varieties of different ways in which the user experiences them but also from the structure and specificity of the underlying code, which again leads to genres of e-lit being known by the software used in the creation and performance of the works. It's this fascinating strong and intense focus on innovation

related to print convention that seem to drive e-lit forward, into new ways of literary transformations. Another interesting key aspect with e-lit is the interaction between the reader and the piece. The general trend in e-lit seems to lean towards interaction with the screen or touchscreen. E-lit tends to set some requirements of interaction when it comes to the user and traversing through the piece and its digital setting as well. The result of this makes the medium a part of the literary exchange. This higher level of interaction also aids in the separation between electronic literature and digital art like Sedition offers, as the artworks within the digital art category has a low level of interaction. As an example, digital art bought from Sedition offers a minimal interaction with the artwork, limited to the opening and closing of the different works. In contrast to the limited digital art, the literary aspect together with the shareable properties makes e-lit quite suitable to viral art. Being that it is a rather broad and contemporary term as well opens up the possibilities for virality to thrive. As a result of a relatively high level of interaction is present in e-lit, many of the artworks also have in common that they are based on ludic elements. These often address politics, something we find present in interfaces and viral art as well. A good example of this type of art is Jason Nelson*'s Game game game and again game* that combines video game play based on survival elements, with writing, drawings and old home movies incorporated into the levels (Nelson 2007).

There is a difference between Internet/digital art and electronic literature versus viral art in the way that net-art doesn't necessarily create content with a public in mind, which is different for much of the later viral art that is made and distributed in order to reach out to as large an audience as possible. Viral art on the other hand must by its very own name exist in relation with virality. Network and especially social networks play an essential and different part in relation to viral art compared to Internet art and e-lit. Although can be said to be made to exist online to some degree, viral art inhabits qualities that allow it to use the social networks as dispersion. Sharing and spreading are some of the essential qualities of viral art, while Internet art have built in qualities that allow it to exist and spread online, they are often not prioritized to the same degree (especially not the first generations). Networks are a part of the content in viral art, while Internet art can be said to exist within the network in order to be online. Internet and digital art can indeed be viral art, but the term viral art goes beyond that of the definition of Internet/digital art. It's also very likely that there exists a blurred zone between viral art and Internet art, where Internet art takes on some of the qualities that viral artworks inhabit. Nevertheless it seems that e-lit and net art originated from a different base

than viral art, as these genres are more oriented around conjuring the computer/network as media in the artistic sense, making it less dependent on a distribution framework. Viral art on the other hand is dependent on viral distribution. While the potential for viral distribution varies a lot from artwork to artwork within the aforementioned genres, it is found in abundance in the next, that is the Internet-meme.

Although memes are very much a standalone term, they are interesting contributions from a contemporary art perspective and also play on virality. The very term itself was first coined by Richard Dawkins in 1976 as an attempt to describe small units of culture spreading from person to person by the way of copying and imitation (Shifman 2013). The term experienced a rise in popularity with the birth of the Internet-meme and web 2.0. The Internet-meme is a rather loose term used to describe the propagation of jokes, videos, and websites from person to person on the Internet (Shifman 2013). The spreading of memes in the form of images is perhaps the most popular form of Internet-memes. These types of images are also known as "image macros". According to the website "Know Your Meme", a website dedicated to documenting different types of Internet phenomena like videos and memes define image macros as a broad term used in relation to the description of captioned images, typically consisting of a picture combined with a witty message or catchphrase. Additionally, image macros can also be used to convey feelings or reactions on discussion forums or messageboards, towards members of the community, which is similar to the predecessor of the image macros, the emoticons. (KnowYourMeme 2016).

These images are usually based around templates (that you can find on dedicated websites) with customizable captions applied to anything from politics, to music videos and events both in and outside the media searchlight. The templates allow anyone with a computer and Internet access to make their own versions of the memes and share them in an instant, which can probably be said to be a partial reason for this very type of memes success. Other reasons for their almost omniscient presence in online social media, is their different and adjustable format that makes memes potentially very durable in the long term, and the fact that they don't belong to nobody but anybody at the same time.

On social media, memes make up a big portion of pop culture with designated sites like 9gag and Imgur where people up vote or down vote the newest contribution, determining the memes own lifespan both as singular cases and as templates (that even retires from the web).

Memes have in fact been compared to the Pop art-movement in the mid twenties, which is not that strange considering the format of memes and the balance between fine and low art they represent (Mosiany 2015). They also inhabit a trait that most art do not, namely the absence of ambiguity. Memes are not meant to be diffuse by nature, but rather to play on identifiable images in relation to cultural (especially pop-culture) events, which is different than most artworks that play on subjective interpretations. These qualities position Internet-memes in an interesting relation with virality, as memes very often appear in viral topics, like the presidential election and alt-right Pepe and are sometimes a result of the viral topic itself.

Finally, I feel the need to revisit the term that is already mentioned earlier in this thesis, related to graffiti art and similar types of artworks that go viral online, namely organic viral art. Defined by author of *Viral Art* (2013) and editor in chief a vandalog.com, RJ Rushmore as:

"art made with the knowledge that it will primarily be shared through active sharing of the content by and to an unknowable group of people rather than through accidental discovery or an invasion of space. That doesn't mean it has to have ever existed on a wall or a canvas. Like street art, organic viral art is defined by distribution methods rather than aesthetic criteria or medium." (Rushmore 2013, 294).

Rushmore place a lot of emphasis on the fact that street art is meeting digital art and that the future of street art and graffiti may lie in digital interventions (Rushmore 2013). He argues that street and graffiti artist are also working with digital technology, creating works of art that doesn't have to exist as anything more than a jpeg or a GIF or even a string of text (Rushmore 2013), and although many of these works would fall into the category of pure digital art, the point of this intersection of these different art genres is a fusion of the core values of street art and graffiti with the technologies of digital art (Rushmore 2013). An example of organic viral art is Faile's Puzzle Box app, available at Apple's app store. Faile, most known for their puzzle boxes made of screenprinted wooden blocks that can be flipped and swapped to juxtapose imagery and create new compositions, ventured into the digital realm in 2011 with their own free app that made it possible to play with digital versions of their work, either with the goal of solving the puzzle, or make your own version of them and share your results online. The result is a reinvention of Faile's trademark art with the expansion into the digital realm, while still maintaining much of the original form and adding new shareable features of the app users own versions of the puzzle boxes.

Rushmore even goes as far as claiming that the qualities inhabited of street art and graffiti that make them an aesthetic addition on a city street, can be done even more effectively online. This is also something that more traditional Internet art doesn't inhabit and therefore fails to attract or force itself upon and audience in the same way that street art, graffiti and viral art do (Rushmore 2013). This is a valid point in many ways, as the history of Internet art has taken place away from the public eye, and failed to connect with a bigger audience. It is not until more recent years that some artworks have gained some attention, and many of these stand out from the rest of the Internet artworks, exhibiting qualities that make them suitable for a different genre, namely viral or organic viral art.

But the introduction of the Internet as a tool of connecting and exhibit creative content contributes to add an underlying notion that this new approach to exposure, in many ways makes the documentation of artwork of equal or even more importance than the artwork itself. The possibilities of gaining fame and recognition through the Internet and social media may have tilted the balance between good content and quantity, although this may prove hard to verify and very subjective. As more and more people are beginning to realize the potential of fame and fortune through different types of exposure on UGG and SNS platforms, the competition of delivering content to your followers or patrons, tightens.

The availability of content, especially video and photo also inhabits the potential of over saturating our ability to appreciate a mesmerizing photo or video. A tight competition is of course a good thing in the way that it helps elevating the standards, but how many images or video clips no matter how breathtaking or interesting, can the human mind consume before it becomes biased and under-stimulated? Will we have to pay a price for this "indulging" of visual content in the future? It is also interesting to note that although analog art or even digital art exhibited in art galleries and similar locations, the introduction of cyberspace plays a major role for the future of art. The old and established ways of exhibiting artworks will most likely never disappear, but it's hard to argue against the fact the the Internet and especially social media platforms play an equally important part for a couple of reasons:

- The online availability in the form of mobile phones and laptops has shaped our daily lives to the degree that we can go online anytime we please, be it for communicative, entertainment, business or educational purposes. We have access to almost whatever

our desire, and statistics show that we spend more and more time online. For the common individual this also means that the Internet have the potential to expose us to art and artworks. This goes with analog art as sculptures and paintings as well. Everything from Mona Lisa to a random graffiti artwork down the street from where you live most likely exist in one or several copies in the form of photos or videos taken and uploaded online. Even though the experience of seeing photos of Michelangelo's statue of David is perhaps a lot more underwhelming than visiting the original in Italy, and in many ways these to experiences of the same artwork can hardly be reasonably compared, the fact remains that for most people the experience is limited to photos or videos online. The digital audience can in many ways be said to be the primary audience and will most likely become even more important in the years to come.

- In relation to the previous point, contemporary artists are adapting to the technological innovations and whether motivated by fame and fortune or not, experimenting with digital media in order to produce new, interesting and original content. It would be naive to not even consider a future where artists have found new ways to mediate their content, streamlining it into our everyday online activities, reaching a bigger audience than before.

As closing comments of this chapter, we see that the transfer from Web 1.0 to 2.0 experienced a change in the consumer, from passive to active, and with this the basis of interaction on social media as we know it today, followed. This in turn also marks several different shifts that are all connected to each other via Web 2.0 and the social networks that followed. More intricate networks and technology used to aid us in navigation and both consumerism and creative appropriation and use of online services, is what grants both virality and the theory of societies of control foothold today. Without the more intricate networks enabled by the Web 2.0 tools, it would be hard to approach the Internet as a form of society of control and virality as well, as the active consumerism also brought new profitable approaches to digital and social media. Going back to the theoretical framework about networks as a set of relationships (Kadushin 2012) we now see the true importance of networks in relation to virality and viral art. We also see that a somewhat evolved network needs to be in place for virality to exist. Taking the network factor into consideration makes it considerably hard to actually approach viral art as just an object by itself. The reason for this is that from a technical point of view, virality is a part of networks and is tied to the

fundamental structure of social network theory, where the relation between objects are being mapped. Being that a network cannot consist of only one object, but has to consist of at least two with at least one relation binding them together, anything viral must be considered an effect or result of these relations.

Additionally, we also see that art labeled as viral is vastly affected by the virality term and mostly works as an effect, rather than a genre itself. This is also the reason why viral art and basically anything else with a viral label can be very different content that transcends into a network and becomes viral. The fact that it is so interconnected with the networks can also explain why it seems hard to actually approach it as a standalone term. In some way it might even be distracting to focus on virality as it appears merged with everything from funny videos, to groundbreaking artworks in the artistic sense. In an online world so focused on content and entertainment, it is important to come back to the underlying theme, politics or profitable agenda of content that reaches so many pair of eyes. And virality can function both as a distraction and guideline to this, depending on how it meets the eye.

5 Discussing virality and viral art as effects and resistance

5.1 Virality and the interface

As new media is intertwined with the interface, so is virality with both. New media foregrounds the interface in the form of screens in dozens of sizes and aspect ratios. Following the understanding of an interface as some kind of window, doorway or quite simply a threshold, we also see a gateway, an opening, allowing passage to another place or plane. It is as Alexander Galloway puts it, that while the "movie screen always directs toward, the computer screen always directs away. If at the movies you tilt your head back, with a computer you tilt in." (Galloway 2012, 12). Galloway follows this with the argument that profiles and not personas is what drives the computer, pointing towards the Internet that is filled with profiles, needs, egocentrism second selves and lives. Virality plays with this, under these circumstances and together with any aesthetic manifestation it is presented to, via its relation with interfaces and new media. Virality in all its shapes and sizes related to the public and connectivity, are perfect examples of conduits for "divine expression received from without" (Galloway 32, 2012), that exist within the interface, or can be said to define what an interface is.

Playing with the romanticism and cybernetic play part of a manmade world manifested in the computer, and the notion of the interface as the location of information flow from one entity to another, viral events and topics blossom out through the jungle of information flow, the many profiles on different social media platforms, and last but not least communication. Viral art, just like virality alone is very much an effect that you can exploit to a varying degree, and one that can change how we perceive our cultural and political society. This can be done in several different ways, but very often if not always, the content needs to possess some metaphorical components, or allegories. Viral art with these qualities will have some kind of purpose to convey a philosophical, or moral, or political point of view. But it differs somewhat from when one looks at an analog allegorical sculpture, painting or similar artwork, that is usually filled with metaphors, with different meanings that together discern some form of lesson. With virality and the qualities of new media added, the allegorical components can stretch way beyond any visual representation of an artwork, permeating, expanding and changing our society. And just as in Plato's allegory of the cave, we find that

it's the allegories in viral art that have the potential to challenge any underlying politics. But these politics can be very hard to filter out from increasingly sophisticated networks like the Internet and social media platforms. The result is that we unfortunately fail to benefit from any true balance, and the task of separating real from the illusionary remains challenging. Even more so than before.

Using viral events to create or stage modern myths like the ones that Zardulu seems to be acting and promoting, is an interesting example of how you can apply virality with no other agenda than to expand and build upon the existing world, with as much focus as possible on hiding the artwork within our society, to the point that it works best when it completely blends in. Anonymous artists are nothing new and have been around much longer than the Internet, and many that work anonymously or under pseudonyms are also able make a living out of their art and often promote it via exposure in one way or another.

Banksy is perhaps one of the most famous examples of anonymous artists in recent times, that have also benefitted greatly from the Internet when it comes to exposure. Starting out as a street artist and graffiti painter, Banksy's trademark style has contributed to the rising popularity of street art, resulting in galleries auctioning artworks that were never intended to exist anywhere but in the public eye. The artworks created by Banksy are also very often carriers of strong politics and criticism of the political climate of modern society (such as the artists depiction of the E.U flag that replaces stars with migrant bodies floating on an ocean). This also goes hand in hand with the anonymity of the artist (we don't know his or her background history), providing artworks that are somewhat less colored by the background of the artists. Nevertheless, hidden art, made by someone working in the shadows without capitalizing on the exposure gained from the fame like Zardulu, where her artworks like the rat taking a selfie with a phone on the subway, or mutated three-eyed catfish in the Gowanus canal is something different and intriguing in a different way, and plays with many aspects of art, artistry and virality that goes beyond any object-oriented approach. Another example of her exposed art is about a couple of buddies finding a prosthetic leg sticking out of a beaver dam, when out canoeing in Forest County. After deciding to take it with them and going through three weeks of Cragislist's lost-and-found board ads, the prosthetic finally got reunited with its owner (Cush, 2017). The finding of the prosthetic was of course documented with the mobile cameras belonging to the guys finding it, further backing up their incredible story. This story, with its happy ending, is a perfect example of media art that is able to walk

the fine line between plausibility and absurdity, making us speculate whether or not it could be real. Had it not been for the fact that Zardulu later confirmed the story to be an elaborate hoax set up by her, by providing alternate images and videos of the staged discovery scene (Cush 2017), we would most likely never gotten to know the truth. In many ways, her artworks are very relevant in a time where so-called "alternative facts" blend in with fake news, and social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter is used by influential individuals like Trump and his allies, to spread propaganda. Zardulu's mythical artworks blend in perfectly in the background of the bigger media events.

But even though the exposed artworks of Zardulu is very innocent in nature, hidden art like this can also prove to have a harmful effect on society. If someone was able to saturate our network with very convincing false information that we are unable to expose, we have a serious problem. This approach of hiding in plain sight is also perhaps one of the few ways to actually influence our everyday lives, without us even knowing it. There is however a big step between creating mostly harmless urban myths, to come up with scenarios that can potentially change the politics of society or how we perceive our culture in general.

Zardulu's type of viral art is also very similar to how fake news works in general. We see that the viral art made with the intent on creating urban myths are essentially elaborate hoaxes, and that we can only pinpoint their effect on society based on the ones we are able to expose as fake content. So the true consequences of this type of viral art lies in the content we have not yet discovered to be fake. This comes back to one of the biggest challenges with new media, namely authenticity and how to separate false and truth, and tackling with the uncertainty that follows a lack of verifying anything.

Recently, researchers at Stanford prototyped, field tested, and validated a bank of assessments that tap civic online reasoning—the ability to judge the credibility of information that floods young people's smartphones, tablets, and computers (Wineburg et al. 2016). The results told of students that showed "stunning and dismaying consistency" to evaluate basic level information, like distinguishing advertisements from articles (Wineburg et al. 2016). These results seem to back up arguments about the news article format being easily imitated and filled with untrue facts that blend in with the myriad of real news that are being shared and posted every day. In addition, Buzzfeed, a global news organization located in New York, that operates on multiple digital platforms and strives to deliver shareable news, released an analysis and comparison of the top 20 generated fake news stories on Facebook.

These 20 fake stories from the last three months of the US presidential campaign, like the one that reported that Pope Francis endorsed Trump, were compared to the top 20 real news that generated the most engagement on Facebook.

The results showed that these highly controversial 20 fake news stories were able to generate 8,711,000 shares, reactions, and comments on Facebook. This is significantly more than the generated number of the top 20 real news stories, that generated a total of 7,367,000 shares, reactions, and comments on Facebook (Silverman 2016). The fact that fake news are able to attract more attention from the public than real news, is an unsettling and scary fact. However, as noted by Craig Silverman, the media editor of Buzzfeed and the author of the article covering this analysis, Facebook engagement does not necessarily mean traffic, and even though the fake news stories generated more engagement, large news sites overall see more engagement than fake news sites (Silverman 2016). If we compare the results from the Stanford research and young people's lacking ability to judge the credibility of information with the one done by Buzzfeed, we find that it's possible to explain at least some of the reasons why the fake news stories are able to become viral. However, it is also necessary to note the fact that the highly controversial content in itself was able to gain more spotlight than the real news, making real news stories appear perhaps duller and not as controversial. Just by looking at the top story in the fake news category, it isn't hard to understand why we would read something as unbelievable (but presented in the believable format of the news article) as the pope endorsing Trump. In this sense, it also functions as modern day propaganda.

It seems that the rise of social media platforms have given birth to fake news as a genre that can offer both negative and positive effects. Negative in the way that false information gets spread fast and has the potential to reach a billion-sized crowd very quickly, which again can have disastrous consequences. But it can also be good in the way that it motivates big players like Facebook and Google to come up with ways to distinguish and verify false news from real news shared on their platforms. Facebook has announced that they will incorporate a way to flag stories of questionable legitimacy with an alert that says "Disputed by 3rd party fact-checkers", and you can already find three Google Chrome plugins that work in a similar fashion when browsing the web (Jamieson and Solon 2016).

There's also the (mostly) harmless satirical way of producing fake news in recent years made famous by The Onion and Clickhole, that very often gets reposted as truth when they appear free of context on social media, and while the main point of satirical articles like those from The Onion are very often humorous, they are still made up and fall under the term fake news. Another point is that all news stories online are motivated by view counts to some extent and thus need to deliver interesting and shareable content, which have the potential of going viral. Whether it is satirical or made to cash in on ad revenue, content that strikes us as unbelievable or sensational pulls us towards it, with a vague promise of igniting a spark of sensationalism or excitement in our daily lives, something that can become increasingly rare after spending time consuming large amounts of information in the shape of various news formats. Labelling something as unbelievable, sensational or just out of the ordinary has become one of the most regular approaches to attract the attention of the online public. This way of exploiting the "curiosity gap" by providing just the right amount of information to make us curious, is also known as clickbait. The almost countless number of clickbait articles attempting to lure us in with their bold headlines ending with headlines like "You won't believe what happens next!" or "This artwork is so unique that you can't afford to ignore it", are for the most part associated with yellow journalism, the use of lurid features and sensationalized news in newspaper publishing to attract readers and increase circulation (Encyclopædia Britannica 2017).

Yellow journalism is also credited for much of the attention directed towards the lives of modern day celebrities, and takes up a great portion of the trending topics. A good example of this is Snapchat. Initially an image messaging application, that has evolved into mass media with a mix of private messaging and public content, including brand networks, publications and live events. Much of the content is focused on selfies and photography with direct attention to the recent news regarding famous people like the Kardashians. There's seemingly a correlation between the popularity of this type of journalism that presents little or no legitimate well-researched news and instead uses eye-catching headlines to attract an audience, with Galloway's claims about the Internet being filled with profiles, needs, egocentrism second selves and lives. This climate also seems to match the consumer criteria for fake news, and after the 2016 U.S. presidential election, we see the apparent challenges to the mainstream media as sources of reliable information. Earlier generations that relied upon newspapers and network news to inform them what is going on in the world – including information about elections, candidates, background, views and policies – are now challenged

with the new media format together with Web 2.0, where news sources are increasingly inaccurate, biased, agenda-laced, and politically motivated.

This problem seems to be rooted in open-source intelligence (OSINT), a format that has become the dominating type of accessible information for most people seeking information online. The challenge lies with the level of distrust that creates significant and permanent implications on how we approach any information. As OSINT is representable in every alternative public source of information, digital news, blog sites, and social media doesn't really steer us in the direction toward authenticity. The challenges of OSINT are similar to viral art, in the way that they both could benefit from a different approach in order to achieve a greater understanding of the mechanics, behind the intricate and sophisticated network systems, that envelopes today's society. They are both in need of a model to help make sense of today's media landscape. An example of how to tackle the problem of authenticity in relation to OSINT can be found in the research of Erik Kleinsmith, Associate Vice President for Business Development in Intelligence, National & Homeland Security, and Cyber for American Military University. Kleinsmith proposal is to use a series of concentric circles representing a potential intelligence source, each requiring an understanding of their unique characteristics (Kleinsmith 2016). Additionally, he adds a general rule, that when these rings move further away from the center (where we find the mainstream media and the most reliable information according to Kleinsmith), the more wild and unrestrained the environment becomes (Kleinsmith 2016). Kleinsmith does however point out that the center ring is where the distrust in news sources originate from, as the fact checking and polishing have been compromised, letting some of the fake news to infiltrate mainstream media. In summary, there is a greater amount of yellow journalism and bogus stories and content the further away from the center ring we move, but quality assurance controls is not foolproof, and articles colored by the bias of the author/publisher happens in mainstream media as well (Kleinsmith 2016). This way of unveiling qualities that Kleinsmith presents is very similar to the concept of describing and expanding or extending relationships between several concepts by the way of the onion metaphor, where each layer that becomes visible to you can add size or complexity incrementally to the central layers. This approach to new media is nothing new in general, as we find that the most recent incarnations of new media is basically contained within other forms grounded in the same base or closely related to it. But what about virality and viral art?

With virality and communication we find techne as technique, art, habitus, ethos, or lived practice in the same way both Galloway and Martin Heidegger envision it. The mechanical action of sharing and connectivity (which again are both important aspects of virality) is almost unconscious, as we forward or mediate content to others while focusing on just that, the forwarding of the content. The underlying mechanics do their part, just as muscle memory work its magic after we've repeated a physical action over some time. Virality is communication and connectivity, and consists both of language and technology. It is a part of the present human culture. Maybe there is a way of looking at virality as a way or part of our communication that takes hold of the principles of techne as a means of standing out in the chaos of profiles, selves and so forth that make up a huge chunk of our online interaction?

Or should we keep to the even more simple explanation of virality, viral topics and events as nothing more as another container within the many containers made at the tail end from previous containers? Installations of media within the installations of the web as an installation and container of text, video, images and so on. It depends on what we want to unveil I guess, as our deconstruction of anything rarely allows us to focus on every piece at the same time, or with the same equal treatment. But with the layers of peeling we come back to the computer interface and how it is designed to connect the codes that together shape everything we want to see when we tilt in. I say anything because in a very basic sense, virality and viral art is just that. What we want to see is something able to stand out as remarkable in some way. Something sensational and something we can connect with others by sharing, making sure that we contribute with our part of the fuel for virality.

5.2 Memes and the Alt-right movement: how a cartoon frog can influence a presidential election.

Figure 8: "Trump-Pepe"

Further hints about the influence of virality may be found in the 2016 US presidential campaign, where viral art in the form of new media found its way onto the main stage. Looking back, the 2016 US presidential campaign will probably never be able to shake of the taint of controversy and extreme media coverage. One of the many contributing factors to this, is Donald Trump's alleged connection with the alt-right movement. A self-described Internet-based movement built on a foundation of white nationalism, the alt-right have made their way into the media spotlight for several reasons, with one of the most interesting ones being their use of propaganda in relation to fake news and memes, with the aid of Trump's retweets of memes especially relevant.

Through 2016 alt-right became a hot topic when they started adopting the "Pepe the frog" meme, and using it in relation to their right to far-right ideologies who reject mainstream conservatism in the United States. This satirical worship of Pepe and Trump seems to have

attracted a bizarre combination of people, some of them serious and others who saw this as an opportunity to implement their own beliefs and influence on the presidential campaign, the most radical of these being the white supremacists within the alt-right movement. These are believed to be the ones who have been trying to "take back" Pepe the frog by adding swastikas and other symbols of anti-semitism and white supremacy to the meme. A quick google image search with the word combination "trump pepe meme", shows a wide array of different use of the meme. Many of the images depicts Trump with green skin and facial features similar to Pepe (figure 8), engaging in different actions, from holding the American flag with a grin on his face, to re-enactments of scenes from the movie Jurassic park, where Trump/Pepe dinosaurs are hunting down a figure resembling Bernie Sanders. Others again use symbols related to antisemitism and racism (like Pepe seemingly harassing Mexican immigrants).

The Pepe the frog meme is not the only meme used in the 2016 US presidential campaign though, but it is the most famous and controversial one, and also an example of how the use and association of memes can change as a result of cultural and societal influence. Also it is important to note the importance of satire in relation to Pepe the frog turning into a white nationalist hate symbol. As both the alt-right and Pepe are born on online bulletin boards (sometimes referred to as motherboards) that attract a lot of different people, it is actually hard to determine how many of the alt-right movement are actually supporters of white nationalism and racism, and how many of them are just joining in for a fun ride (something that seems to happen a lot with viral pop culture. It's also important to note that one of the first places where Pepe, Trump and white nationalism merged, was the on 4chan's political discussion board entitled "Politically Incorrect" (/pol/), a place known for being a melting pot for both well-meaning freethinkers, humorists and misguided mad men.

The 2016 US presidential election will also go probably down in history as the first where Internet memes played a bigger part as well, and was also a contributor to the extreme media coverage of the event. Through his Twitter account, Trump regularly posted memes that played on campaign related issues which again were retweeted, liked, and replied to by thousands as a result of his popularity and huge number of followers. Many of these memes were controversial and gained even more exposure through critics while still proving effective tools in the campaign. This also touches upon the effectiveness and accessibility of virality in today's important political matters. By acknowledging the importance of memes in

Internet culture, Trump seems to have used them in an effective way to get an upper hand on his opponents, by playing along with the memes and meme culture, amplifying their voices via his own social media profile on Twitter. His very often politically incorrect approach to many subjects and topics, proved to fit like a glove with the members of forums and subforums like 4chan's /pol/.

Fake news expert at Buzzfeed Craig Silverman's analysis of the usage of partisan memes during the presidential election campaign found that sharing of misinformation related to the election, demonstrated that memes were one of the two categories of content that performed well. The reason for this he argues, is that even when they weren't factually based, they successfully managed to be provocative and engage people in terms of sharing and site traffic (NPR 2016). This again is also probably related to how memes seem to enforce what people already believe instead of changing actual beliefs (NPR 2016). Trump and his staff seemed to be well informed on these mechanics and have proved how valuable memes can be as political tool, if wielded correctly. Memes as a tool for expressing people's views were also shown in the "Bernie or Hillary" meme, a comparison of Bernie Sanders popularity among young voters to Clinton's attempts to appeal to mainstream culture by adopting terms and slangs belonging to the youth, and using it in a political context. This meme seems to be some kind of response from Internet culture and the creators of these memes to how Bernie and Hillary's actions are received (figure 9).

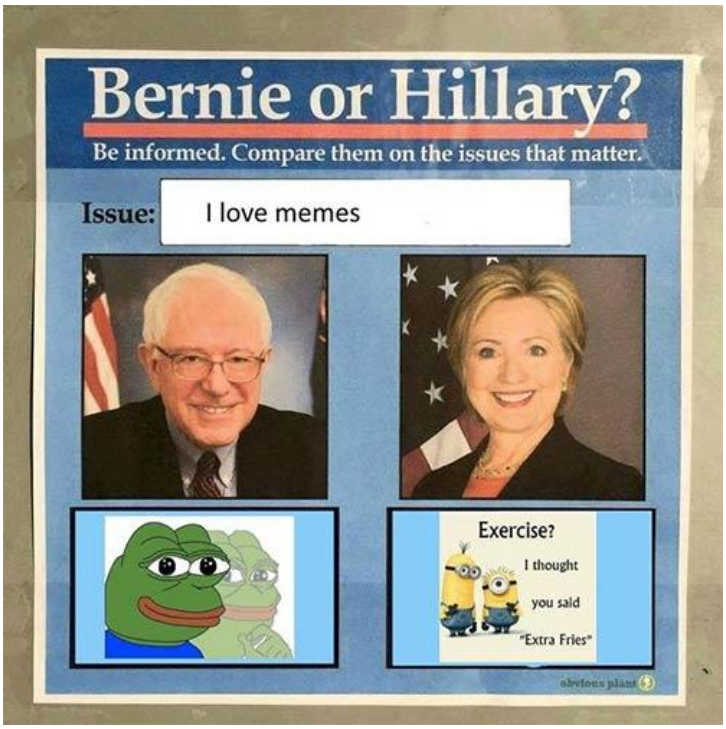

Figure 9: "Bernie or Hillary?"

There are several noteworthy examples of the use and appropriation of new media, virality and viral art in the 2016 US presidential campaign, but two factors really stand out: Trump and his position and role as a gatekeeper for memes, and the communities that gave birth to Pepe the frog in the image of the alt-right movement. As viral art is a part of this information or content flow-system, it has to be filtered and processed by the gatekeepers as well. Or perhaps it is possible to say that viral art only becomes viral after it has been filtered and processed by the gatekeepers? Considering that content get saturated more quickly if it passes some of the bigger gatekeepers, e.g., influential bloggers, electronic newspapers, or celebrities, its label as viral content is dependent on passing the gates and not getting blocked. When the Pepe the frog memes got picked up and further shared by Trump, who had over 20 million followers on twitter halfway through 2016, the potential viral effect following can be really big. Additionally, recent information reveal that using bots to generate followers and retweets are becoming more and more common, and is a big problem in relation to authenticity on the web.

It is now possible to download software that makes it very easy to fabricate unlimited number of friends or followers on social networks. Software like this is fairly cheap (Twitter Supremacy, a bot generator designed to work with Twitter cost only $50), and can be used in

profitable ways. This is done by using the software to program fake accounts to tweet, retweet and follow others automatically. Similar services can be found for Instagram, Vine, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and similar platforms. By creating a fake army of friends or followers, any user can have increased influence on the dispersion of content, further increasing the possibilities of it becoming a viral event/topic. For every fake account, you get an additional retweet. With enough fake accounts, your impact on any desired topic/event can become substantial.

Another way of using bot generators and fake followers/friends is to charge companies for promotion of their products by tweeting or sharing content with your followers or following their pages. To do this however, you would need quite a big following, with only a relatively low percentage of fake followers. In Trump's case with his Twitter account, different people are estimating that between 8 (Bialik 2016) and 20 (Bilton 2016) percent of his followers are fake. It's worth noting that celebrities and other users often have no control over the number of their fake followers, as platforms like Twitter don't really have any filtering for what kind of people are allowed to follow. Bot farms will often follow big-name celebrities, regardless of whether a celebrity is a client or not. In this way it is easy to see how the power structure of many of the gatekeepers is skewed, and how the surface appearance of anything online is the most important. Very often in this age of ludic capitalism or play economy, it doesn't really matter if the numbers are wrong or misleading as long as they work in your favor. Bot farming in this case is a problem because it can buy you influence on the different social media platforms in a way that violates their terms of use, while swaying public opinion about culture and products and, in some instances, influencing political agendas as well.

Shifting the focus over to the communities that gave birth to Pepe the frog, we see the importance of reaching out to a large audience, as communities like /pol/ often contribute to much of the trending content by posting it and exposing it in front of an audience that can be way bigger than most us can reach through their own social media profiles. Looking at Reddit as an example, with over 1.2 billion visitors over a course of three months (Statista 2017), the exposure for any content that get enough upvotes to appear on their frontpage, will immediately go viral on a very big scale. The same can be said for 4chan's messageboard /pol/, with an average population of 100 000 in 2016 (archive.4plebs.org 2017). Somewhere within this population, the reincarnated Pepe the frog, emerged. We know that /pol/ is a melting pot of different people, where many of the users seeking it out for entertainment

purposes only. We also know that it attracts people with very strong right to far-right ideologies. But we don't actually know for sure if the first alt-right Pepe the frog meme was made as a joke or not, or the full extent of satire in relation to these events. We do know however, that it sparked a wave of these memes that would eventually find its way outside of 4chan's messageboards and into the presidential election.

Using the concept of homophily in relation to the social network theory, we are able to explain at least part of the relation between Trump and the online communities that gave birth to alt-right Pepe. Being that both Pepe and the alt-right movement originated online and on messageboards, there must be some kind of special norms and values connecting the two. This again is probably related to the politics and "trolling" characteristics of /pol/. Trolling in Internet slang is the actions performed by an individual (a troll) that sows discord on the Internet by starting arguments or upsetting people, often for the troll's very own amusement. The climate on /pol/ can be said to attract a large amount of trolls, or just people that come to be entertained by the high amount of provocative content. Pepe the frog, being an already well established meme on 4chan was an ideal contender to be picked up by this crowd, playing the binding part or characteristic between the individuals that came for the amusement, and the more serious right-winged people identifying as members of the alt-right movement. Both status-homophily and value-homophily are at play in the case of alt-right Pepe and when Pepe became associated with Donald Trump, the maximum potential for it to go viral was achieved. Without Trump as a very influential gatekeeper into pop-culture and politics, the popularity of alt-right Pepe would lack quite a lot in common attributes and characteristics with the rest of the world, remaining more of a niche viral event.

Regarding the gatekeepers of the social networks, we see that both Trump and any generated bots affiliated with his Twitter account, contributed greatly to the popularity of alt-right Pepe. The moment Trump chose to embrace the underground culture of alt-right and Pepe the frog by sharing various memes on via Twitter, he not only made sure that the alt-right and Pepe became a world known phenomena but also probably gained even more followers in the alt-right movement and underground cultures associated with subforums like /pol/. I say maybe, because as I've already mentioned, it is hard to actually know the full extent of the alt-right movement as a result of their involvement and origin as (mostly) an online movement, on platforms attracting many different kinds of people. And even though many of the memes are

actually parodying Trump and the alt-right, Trump chose to share some of them, further building up under his pop-cultural persona.

If research shows us that memes only seem to enforce already existing beliefs within a networked system like the Internet, how can they also work as an opposing force? This is one of the key issues I have with any viral artwork or viral content as a form of resistance in general. I won't say that it cannot work, but the qualities of virality is such that it works only as long as the gatekeepers of the network allow it to saturate and spread. In this way it is very hard for a viral topic/event to actually introduce radical new and different change to a society of control. Thus it can only actually work as an opposing force as long as it plays within the boundaries of already somewhat established beliefs.

Maybe there's a point in the evolvement of the Internet towards an intricate and sophisticated network structure, where viral art actually has a better chance at being a crusader of revolution, but it seems that today's online climate is perhaps beyond this point. Again it depends on our angle of approach. Looking at alt-right Pepe, it is possible to say that its road to viral fame is that of a "lucky coincidence" where a group of people with hateful and racist opinions found a way to bypass the gatekeeping system by being in the correct place and time to find a powerful and influential individual gatekeeper like Trump, that sees any PR as good PR, choosing to mediate some of their propaganda fabric stitched into alt-right Pepe. This can also be said about artists like Zardulu as well, but both examples still play on established beliefs and the level of any actual influence on society as resisting forces is perhaps minimal. On the other hand, the fact that a relatively small underground community is able to go viral in the way that alt-right and Pepe did, shows creation as a function that is used as means of escaping and as a way of non-communicating bubbles of resistances to communication and information in the vision of Deleuze. But is it authentic? Can Trump's 20 million plus Twitter army, with its many bots, be said to be an accurate representation of resistance against a society of control during his run for presidency? Probably not.

If the system is saturated with algorithms that you can program to perform tasks to the extent that it can influence the outcome, then the system is rigged to do so and would still maintain control. Looking at gatekeeping theory in the angle of approach similar to the one Galloway uses in *Protocol: How Control Exists After Decentralization* (2001), we acknowledge the protocol as an ambivalent task manager. On the one side, protocol is what keeps the Internet

open and accessible, because of the underlying guidelines and mechanisms make every website formatted the same way. On the other hand, this homogenizes and constraints all matter into the same format that has to be approved to even be readable at all. This is problematic for any form of art designed to act as a resistance. This also severely limits the control of any individual gatekeeper from the beginning, as the underlying mechanical protocols have already put heavy constraints on the formatting of the content. Virality then, is suddenly reduced to a messenger of the most popular homogenized content approved by the protocol. The case of Trump and alt-right Pepe however, shows how virality in effect is able to function as an incubator of oppressive ideology, in this case the alt-right movement, as they quickly found themselves on the front page of mainstream media, spreading their message all over social media, becoming so powerful that the original creator of Pepe choses to kill the character in a desperate attempt to reset Pepe (Cavna 2017). This tells us about the power of virality and is also a clue about the resisting force within it.

Back to the interfaces once again, we can acknowledge Galloways introduction of the intraface as well. The intraface being defined as an interface internal to the interface, where a type of aesthetic implicitly brings together the edge and the center thus subsuming and containing the interface within the image (Galloway 2012). This further on builds on his definition of interfaces as something that is not stable, but rather a multiplicity of processes, which can also be said about viral art and virality. This lack of object-centered approach is interesting and refreshing and related to viral art. In the same way that Galloway conceives the interface as an effect rather than something static like an object, so is the virality of viral art. It's an effect connected to the techniques of mediation and interaction, but gets conceptually anchored to objects, like artworks, and these artworks are always abiding with the protocol. Until they find a way to bend the rules that is.

5.3 A matter of appropriation

It seems that virality and viral art in relation to the Internet as a form of society of control, is also very much about appropriation. Trump and the alt-right movement stand out as a classical example in this regard, where you take something initially negative and turn it around to your advantage. When memes of alt-right Pepe and Trump started going viral, nobody expected Trump to actively engage with them, by tweeting or retweeting memes or topics related to the alt-right movement. During the campaign, when Hillary Clinton called half of Trump's supporters "deplorables", his response was to publish a press release where

he denounced Clinton's "deplorables" comment, accusing her of bigotry and hate towards millions of Americans. Additionally, a meme shared by one of his sons on Twitter and Instagram sparked a great deal of controversy around Clinton's statement and Trump's allies. This meme depicted a poster for the action film "The Expendables", where the lead figures were swapped out with Donald Trump, two of his sons, Republican vice-presidential candidate Mike Pence and other various prominent conservatives, and most importantly Pepe the Frog (figure 10). Other memes related to Clinton's "deplorables" statement also went viral, and Trump chose to use the "deplorables" term actively through the rest of his campaign.

This is only one of the many examples where Trump proved his ability to manipulate propaganda used against him, and turning it around so that it can benefit his cause instead. The reason for this seems to lie in in his public persona and very frequent use of social media platforms like Twitter, where his political agenda has been able to find its way to the part of the online demographic that in some ways may have felt neglected by the other candidates, or just simply found him more entertaining. Either way, all the Trump related Internet memes and his choice to embrace them and use them as a part of his campaign, proved to be a successful tactic. Internet memes are perhaps the most common genre of art appearing online exemplifying appropriation. Their template-based public domain format and popularity is a recipe for a potential powerful viral tool. Art today is more openly critical of the culture in which it arises, and very often it refers explicitly to that culture, something that can be said to be the trademark of Internet memes. It is the nature of appropriation art that the subject is copied or borrowed in some way, and being that the Internet memes are not copyrighted, appropriation becomes more innocent, playful and accessible and reminiscent of the early days of the genre. Appropriation related to art with origins in new media in general is more accessible and seems to be regarded more as public domain than most analog art. What we see as a result of Trump's appropriation of memes and Internet culture in general, is a perpetual grinding of events and topics related to his actions, continuously expanding on his public character. Essentially, Trump has managed to create a mythos based on his actions and persona that rallied a portion of the population that in some ways was being neglected. And his ability to turn things around by appropriation or even just go with the flow, together with the powerful reach virality has, played an important part in his election as US President.

Figure 10: "The Deplorables"

5.4 Is social media changing the norms of art practice?

It seems that the type of viral art like Zardulu makes works on many different conscious, subconscious and even unconscious levels, depending on whether we are able to expose it to be fake or not. Additionally, the artworks are deeply connected to the social networks and the Internet in general, that its functions are lost when we try to separate it from them. Zardulu's art very much fits into Deleuze and Guattari's model of the "rhizome" in relation to the nodes of a network. As every artwork goes beyond that of the viral video or photo serving us an initial narrative, art that is hidden within the networks systems will ceaselessly establish connections between the semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles like politics. The end result is a merging with our culture and society, where the story of rats taking selfies or three-eyed catfish becomes an implementation of our society and culture, whether fake or real.

The classification of Zardulu's art as coherent/incoherent aesthetics or politics is relative to whether or not it is exposed as a hoax or urban myth. A video of the selfie rat is something that initially can be regarded as coherent aesthetic, as it points to the gravitation toward the center of the work of art. It's the process of centering, of gradual coalescing around a specific being that draws us towards it. However, it is important to note that if we compare Galloway's ranging of coherent/incoherent aesthetics and politics with Barthes's studium and

punctum, the focus of the second element is much more powerful and compelling, namely the fact that it's a selfie taken by a rat. The rat is the point of impact that made the image go viral in the first place, but in this case, the viral artwork goes much deeper.

Aligned with coherent politics we arrive at ideology, myth or propaganda (depending on a lesser or more sympathetic approach). But the allegory of the artwork remains mostly hidden from our eyes and is removed the moment we are told that it is a hoax. With this in mind, the artworks move closer to an incoherent aesthetic. This is where the ethical regime enters as a significant bearing. Here, the various self-revealing or self-annihilating aspects of the viral artwork becomes a "fixed" political aspiration. The selfie rat is an example of a socio-technical new media artwork that exhibits a sophisticated understanding of how interfaces work as an effect together with networks and social media platforms. It is very much a de-objectification of art once its true meaning is revealed to us. It also aids us as a way of showing how the totality of social relations in our commodified world is manifested in literary works, art or media, and how the flows of signification organize a certain knowledge of the world and how we choose to commit to it.

Representation in the case of Zardulu's art and fake news in general, can be said to be beautiful or deceptive. By following the ethical qualities that come forth once we acknowledge that any artwork can have the potential to go beyond its initial manifestation as an object, we are initially left with the incoherent aesthetic and coherent politics mode. This is what makes Zardulu's works political artworks, or rather politically significant art. It's also art that is dependent on its viral qualities, that flow like droplets of water, permeating the nodes and clusters of whatever networks it is born into, like a rhizome. It needs to trend and saturate the networks in order to actually get a foothold as a myth and not a hoax. And without virality, it would not serve its purpose as a building block in the myths and legends of society and therefore lose its purpose in the eyes of its creator.

By approaching the example of alt-right Pepe and the presidential election in the same way, we see another mode of coherent/incoherent aesthetics and politics. Or rather a further departure from ideology in the form of more classical effectivity and more a simulation, or what Galloway calls an "imaginary relationship to ideological conditions" (Galloway 2012, 50). In many ways, the relation between Trump, the alt-right movement and alt-right Pepe in the light of the mass media attention, also results in politically significant art or incoherent aesthetics and coherent politics at its best. But it also substantially presents to us to the fourth

mode, incoherent aesthetics and incoherent politics. This mode, that Galloway address as truth form, is under-appreciated, elusive, and sidelined as Galloway believes that the system in reality is simplified into two regimes. These two are the ethical and poetic forms, or the politically significant art, and the fine art (Galloway 2012). In the example of Trump and alt-right Pepe however, there's a shift in the focus from the computer and its simulation of ideology, where virality and viral art is attempting to work as incoherent aesthetic in the service of coherent politics, but instead ends up to incoherent aesthetics and politics, ultimately leading to some sort of confusion or short-circuit. This is the part of Galloway's theory about a shift from the ideological to the ethical mode, I would at least to a certain degree argue against. The truth form (also called nihilism form) seems to be very much present in viral events and topics like the aftermath of US presidential campaign bearing witness about the destruction of existing modes of art and justice, as a result of distrust to, and appropriation of the mass media and social media platforms.

How we perceive information and content in general, seems to have run into somewhat of a shift after fake news became such a significant part of the 2016 US presidential election. Suddenly, we became aware of the system's lack of authenticity in some aspects regarding our information consumption. There was a larger general realization that we were gullible subjects, being fed lies. And being that we are under the guidance of the protocols as the machine gatekeepers, we might feel trapped in a society of control, where information is beginning to form strong ties with appropriation. Memes and artworks by people like Zardulu, seems to thrive and prosper in this climate, while also forcing us to approach contemporary art in new ways in order to understand their place in the parallel simulated world that we know as the Web.

Appropriation can also to a certain degree, explain how it seems like viral art is able to go full circle as a force of resistance within the Internet as a form of society of control. Comparing the example of Trump, alt-right and Pepe to Zardulu, we find two very different but still similar approaches to the appropriation and use of virality. Trump's way of turning alt-right Pepe to his favor, further building on his own mythos only summons more questions regarding virality and the societies of control. This is mostly a result of the unique connections between the different actors, especially the mixture of individuals that are drawn to both Trump and /pol/. Or basically the relations between all the components. Going back to Habermas and his communicative action theory, it seems that the members of a subgroup

or a distinctive community (in this case /pol/) have been able to build a continued discourse based on the commonalities of experience and taste regarding the subject of Trump, alt-right and alt-right Pepe. Once the memes became properly inculcated in the discourse, various participants in this community ventured out and engaged in dialogue with others from different backgrounds, who had also undergone similar formative or reformative experiences, by posting or resharing memes on different social media platforms. This communicative power that is ultimately manifested in virality within the social networks, in turn generates potential influence to our society, but lacks any decent way to administrate it (according to Habermas's definition of the formation of will in a rational collective always takes place outside the formal organizations).

Looking at Zardulu again, we can see the potential of this type of viral art to actually influence our society, albeit on a relatively low key scale. This hidden art based around mythology seems to bypass or trick the protocol in the same way that fake news is manipulating the news article format. As long as we acknowledge that the format of the opposing force in the shape of viral content is not entirely groundbreaking, as it still has to abide by the homogenisation of information requirements set by the protocol, then viral art at least inhabits the potential to act out as a resistance to the society of control.

6 Concluding thoughts

6.1 An effect to be reckoned with

I would argue that while Deleuze actually states that art has the potential to become a form of resistance to the dynamics of societies of control, viral art as a result of its merging with virality, is perhaps more susceptible to it than actually being able to oppose or build a resistance. Based on an assumption that Deleuze's definition of art tackles with the core concept of it, labeling every instance of art, regardless of genre within it as independent from both its maker and its model, possibly makes viral art an ambassador on steroids for a society of control. Its ability to traverse the sophistically and intricate online social network, and to pop up in our newsfeeds and any other type of social media interface, attest to this. At the same time virality and viral art have to work under the protocol in order to actually roam the networks that the Internet consist of. The fact that the protocol is homogenizing any content that gets online makes virality and viral art a useful tool for a society of control in the shape of the Internet, more than it actually is able to work as a resisting force by introducing completely new concepts within the system of the society of control. This is not to say that viral art is unable to do so, as we see hints to this in Zardulu's artworks, where the components of the "true" artwork itself is initially hidden from the audience. In the case of Trump and alt-right Pepe, we see the resistance in the shape of something else: namely the break or short-circuit from the incoherent politics and aesthetics, breaking from the loop of the system towards something new. Taking into consideration that Deleuze emphasized creation as a function used as means of escaping and as a way of non-communicating bubbles of resistances to communication and information in relation to art, we find that the effect, or mythos of virality and viral art in both examples have no prior existence, thus creating new content in the shape of a mutation in the construction of the individual subject. And there you have it: Resistance found a foothold.

6.2 Viral art of the now

Virality and viral art are under the laws of society's specific expressions and manifestations of taste and mass culture. This must apply for every viral artwork on a viral scale, be it a huge pop-cultural phenomena, or a much smaller viral event/topic. Its habitus built on a mix of capital and cultural climate is unveiled in the appreciation of art in our daily online social lives and on the revenue it collects for the owners of the many social media platforms built on

slogans based on sharing culture. These slogans are the remnants of the early days of Web 2.0 and an envisioned future that never really manifested as expected, an envisioned future that perhaps would take less the shape of a society of control, and more the shape of "true" free sharing of content without the cost of freedom and personal information. Nevertheless, we need to look at the present situation and learn from the Web we are presented with today, and our everyday interaction with the Web today is deeply affected by virality.

The unknown or mythos surrounding viral events and topics is something shared by both an audience and within the public, that plays on some known and unknown variables that make virality a powerful force or effect. Viral art can contribute to a further understanding of how we make something technological social, or sociality technological (it works both ways) and also how the aesthetic permeates our online world. It plays with the aesthetic in any size and no matter how rooted within or outside pop culture. It is also rooted in the present-ness, perhaps much more than many other types of art (even the many subgenres of digital and Internet art). In addition to being based around technology that very likely won't exist in a hundred years and leaving us with viral art, that will transcend over to text descriptions together with the many other genres of digital or online-based art, (which is also a really interesting subject), the glory days for most viral art are just that, days. After maxing out on the viral scale, viral art returns to the sea of information and content. It is still art, and has reached the benchmark for society to label it viral. Virality then together with any form of digital art is of the now.

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